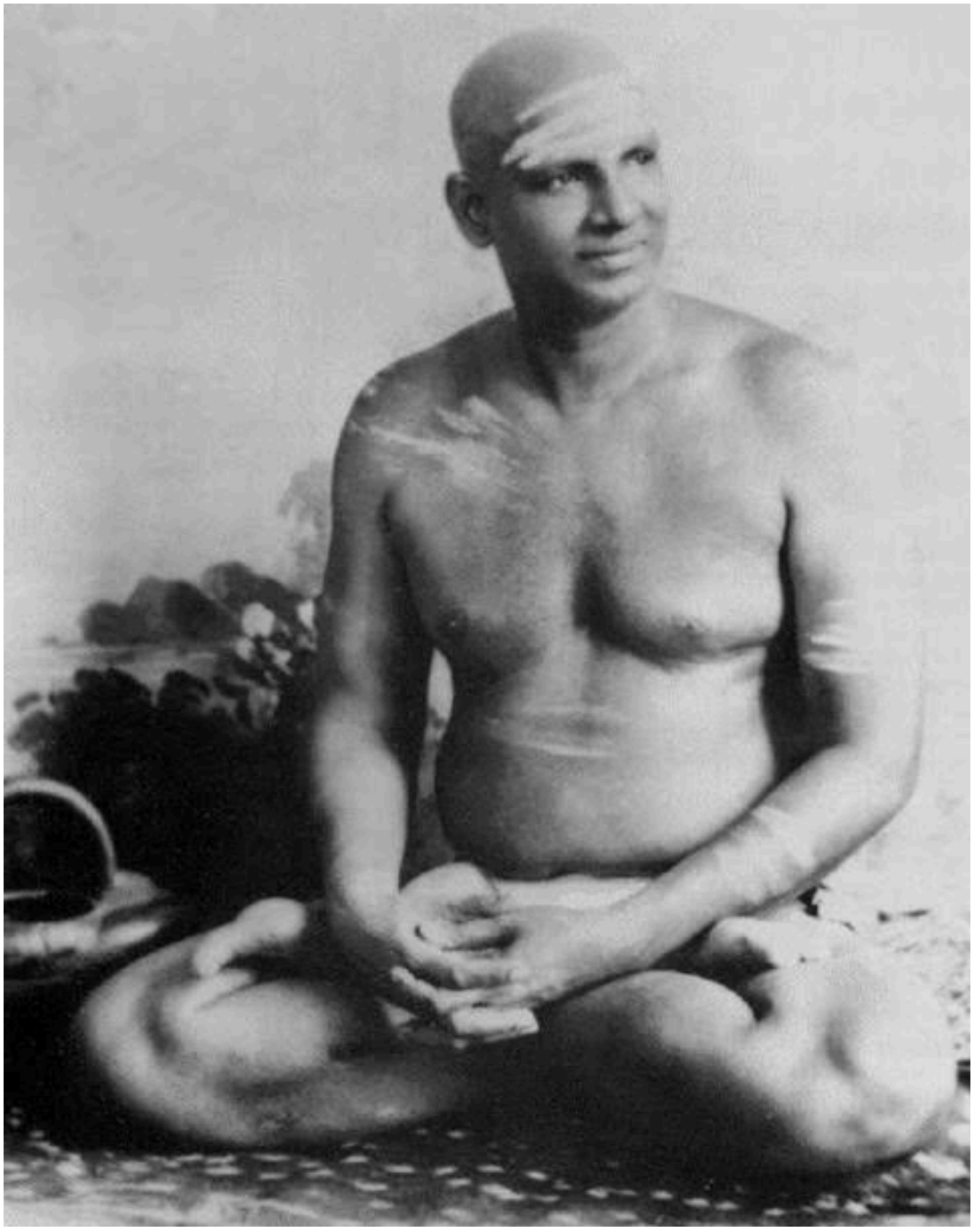

Varanasi Rediscovered

B. BHATTACHARYA

Varanasi Rediscovered

B. Bhattacharya

With 40 black & white illustrations and 12 maps

Munshiram Manoharlal
Publishers

To the People of Varanasi

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Preface

There is no other city in India which evokes as much interest in mindful tourists as the city of Varanasi. This by no means is a modern interest. It has been running through the veins of India's history ever since. From the times we know of history, and the history of tourists in India, we find that traders, scholars, philosophers, wanderphiles from China to British Isles, from African to the Russo- German territories, even from the learned Arab lands the interested make a beeline for the renowned city of Varanasi.

The trend has not yet abated. In fact it is on the increase; and books after books are coming out on the charmed city of undying Varanasi, the gorgeous, the mystifying, the fascinating Varanasi, the oldest city that never loses its youth.

And most of those who had the luck of 'feeling' the throbs of the magic city have been itched by a consuming desire of keeping a record of his/her reactions of the first meet with the great city of the learned and the bold and frank.

The earliest books on Varanasi from the foreign pen are from the inevitable and unbeatable Chinese, and Arabs. Thereafter we have records from Africans, French, German and of course

English travellers, officials, scholars. The literature on Varanasi includes photographers, etchers, painters etc., who found it irresistible to etch, paint, sing, ridicule the ancient city.

The list of books on Varanasi would fill pages. One of the latest comprehensive books, Varanasi, the City of Light by Diana L. Eck has introduced Varanasi to the foreigners who seek information on the city for a tourist's use. This author has done a commendable job under inevitable restrictions from which a non-Hindu, and specially a white lady has to work. Whereas she has accumulated a lot of information from such sources as came under her perview, she could not get herself admitted to those tucked away holes and corners which the confirmed Hindu alone could reveal.

One of the most delectable works on Varanasi comes from the pen of Dr. Motichand Kasi ka Itihasa, who could certainly have elaborated on the subject had, he had the opportunity of writing his treatise after Independence. Authorship during the British Raj was no easy matter, specially for a social critic. And history is nothing but the criticism of the times. His work, commendable and detailed as it is, could have been more critical and probing of the times and the social changes in Varanasi. But authorship during the British Raj for an Indian was a complex proposition and most of his writings was done before 1947. It was indeed difficult to adopt the stance of a social critic at that point of time. And history proves to be lifeless without a penetrative criticism of the times it deals with. History without a critical approach is no history.

There is a gem of a book, Kasidham, in Bengali published by a not too well-known 'press' in Calcutta (Indian Art School) by Manmatha Nath Chakravarty which throws much light on

Varanasi for one who admires Varanasi. Written about eight decades back naturally the book indulges in some euphoria about glorifying in Hinduttuam, and upbraiding the non-Hindu communities, as well as speaking very high of the administrative skill of the English. Nevertheless, the quantity, quality and arrangement of the informations given demand credit for details and arrangement, provided some inaccuracies are overlooked.

Two small books on Kasi by Bisvanath Mukerji, and The Sacred Complex of Kasi by L.P. Vidyarthi, together with Varanasi: Down the Ages by K.N. Shukla demand critical notice from anyone writing on Varanasi. And of course the works of E.B. Havell and M.A. Sherring are today regarded as classics.

Yet this attempt may offer an excuse. It certainly avoids to be a repetition of what has been worked on before, and how. Yet it is not an original work in true sense of an archaeologist. The author has attempted to cover those grounds which, perhaps considered as too controversial, have never been treaded on.

It has gone more into what-s and why-s and how-s of the past of Varanasi. Varanasi's special character, distinguishing social norms, patterns, complexes, population-distribution, specially the antecedents of its multi-tenored human problems and human achievements reflected against the commanding cultures of the House of Oudh and the House of Balwant Singh, the Raja of Benares, have attracted the attention of the author more, than a mere recital of the names of temples, localities and ghats of Varanasi.

This book has tried to visualise Varanasi from the Harappan age to the present times, wading through the mass of details as offered by the invaluable Puranas, the indicative names of the localities, the forgotten and bedevilled natural landmarks of Varanasi, and make a volte face about the very position and placing of the city as we now know, and as we ought to know.

There had been many Varanasi-s; the city as it stands today betrays its accurate location which is no longer recalled today. The city even today recites a string of its names, without ever worrying to explain what those names would mean, and what historical indications imbedded lie deep into those seed words that reveal the new Varanasi, never before imagined by any other author.

This book proposes to lay a great store by the names of localities, and proposes to dig up the lost history, and reset the actual ancient city of Varanasi against a correct perspective through traditional changes of names, to which it still clings, in spite of the changed and changing names.

Similarly lost rivers and lakes localised by the Purana narratives, and the lost social conditions have been rediscovered through such important treatises as Girvana Padamanjari, Krtya Kalpataru (KKT), Tirtha Vivecanakanda (TVK), Girvana Vagmanjari, Kasi Mahatmyam (K. Mhtm./K. Mhm./K. Mtm.), Vividha Tirthakalpa, and of course Agni Purana, Vayu Purana, Matsya Purana, but above all Kasikhaṇḍa (K. Kh.) section of the famous Skanda Purana.

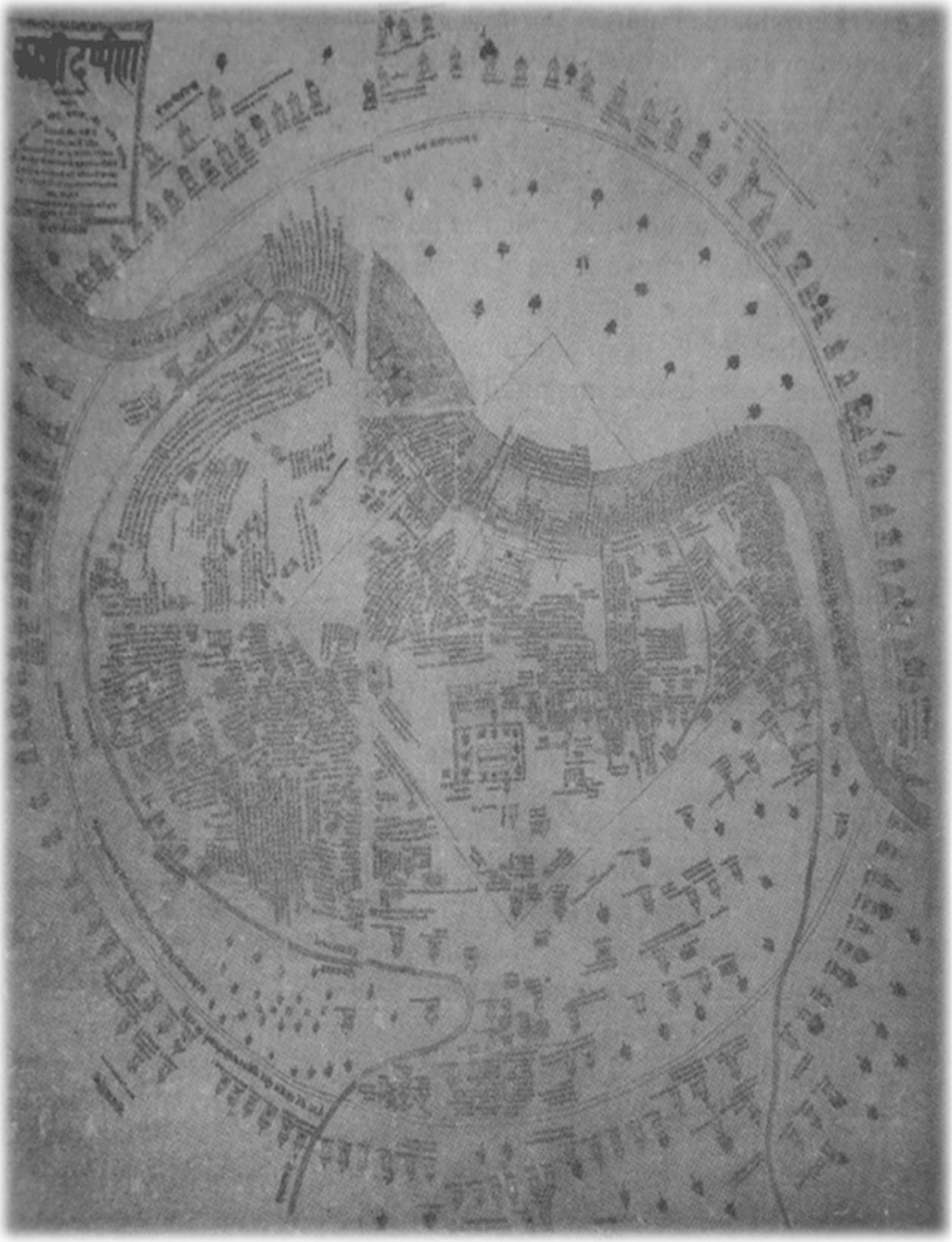
In preparing the typescript of the book I have been assisted by Sri Sankarsan Banik, and am obliged entirely to my friend Mr. Bikash Biswas who deserves an author's sincere thanks.

The 'Notes' appended to the text are meant for clearing up certain controversial and hazily grasped points, and directing attention to original sources.

New Delhi

Phalguni Purnima 1998

B. BHATTACHARYA



Map. 1. Kasidarpana: traditional conventional map still sought by pious pilgrims

1

The Eternal Abode

I

Who does not know Varanasi? Or, who does? Venice, Cairo, Baghdad, Damascus, Peking, Rome, names haloed in epics, lores, legends as 'ancient', sound 'modern' in comparison. All of these have been alive, and are still buzzing.

We are not speaking of dead cities: Thebes, Ur, Knosses, Troy, Persepolis, Bogoz-koi, Mohenjo-daro, Lothal, Kalibangan. We are not speaking of dead cultures. Varanasi is a distant echo. Coming down from other times. She is still busy, alive, buzzing. We are speaking of this vibrant city. In speaking of Varanasi we speak of a functional town. The glorified Aryan hordes had still been driving their horses across arid stretches and desert passes, in search for green acres and secured habitats far beyond the challenging terrains of the Caucasus, Elburz, Hindukush and Badakhshan,... still daring the sandy horrors of Dash-e-Lut, Sarhad, Baluchistan, and finally the formidable Thar. They 'came down like wolves on the fold.' That indeed was a far away time. The Sarasvati still carried her crystal currents from the Himalayas to the Kutch and the sea through the holy village of Puskaravati. The hungry riders having reached a land of milk and honey forgot their horse-flesh-and-beef years. They had arrived at agriculture and land settlements. They sang of Indra, Parjanya, Vasundhara (clouds, thunder, rains and productive earth).

These riders were other people with other patterns of life. Their sudden appearance had radically disturbed the natives of the soil, belonging to other times, more ancient and more conservative. These had been the autochthons, the indigenous builders of their settlements, all on their own. The hoariness of their past out-reaches the yardstick of historical time.

And Varanasi had met those hordes. Varanasi had out-aged the Aryans.

We of today could only faintly imagine how the autochthons, the settled of the land, lived their own system, part rural, part urban, part sophisticated, part nomad.

The gods these stone-age settlers believed in, lived in the skies and beyond. Their blessings poured in rains, and conferred fertility.

Their gods principally belonged to this mysterious forces of fertility. The power of heaven displayed mostly through human wombs, and their function. The pain-joy joy-pain syndrome of sex and reproduction held them in awe, and they worshipped the mystery of life.

On this placid pastoral tranquillity descended a cataclysmic disaster.

The distant far away clatter of thousands of unshod hooves had finally come to a halt. The hungry riders found a people living in peace, and making the earth yield their food in plenty. They decided to settle.

They settled on the new lands washed by a multitude of rivers.

Today the good old earth has been disgorging the rude evidences of those turmoiled times through which the settled

perished,yieldingplacetoanyetunsettledmassofgrabbersof the soil.

Townships laid through planned hard labour had been destroyedandconsignedtodumbdustandwildhowls.The DevashaddemolishedtheDasyus,andtheVedasgotfilled with descriptions of those sanguinary events.

TherecordssaythatVaranasitoocouldnotescapeherquotaof misery.ButVaranasirefusedtobeconsignedtothesilenceof dusts.Molestedagainandagain,sheroseagainandagainfrom her humiliationsandmisery.

She rosetodefyTime,andsetarecordinhistoryforstubborn tenacity.

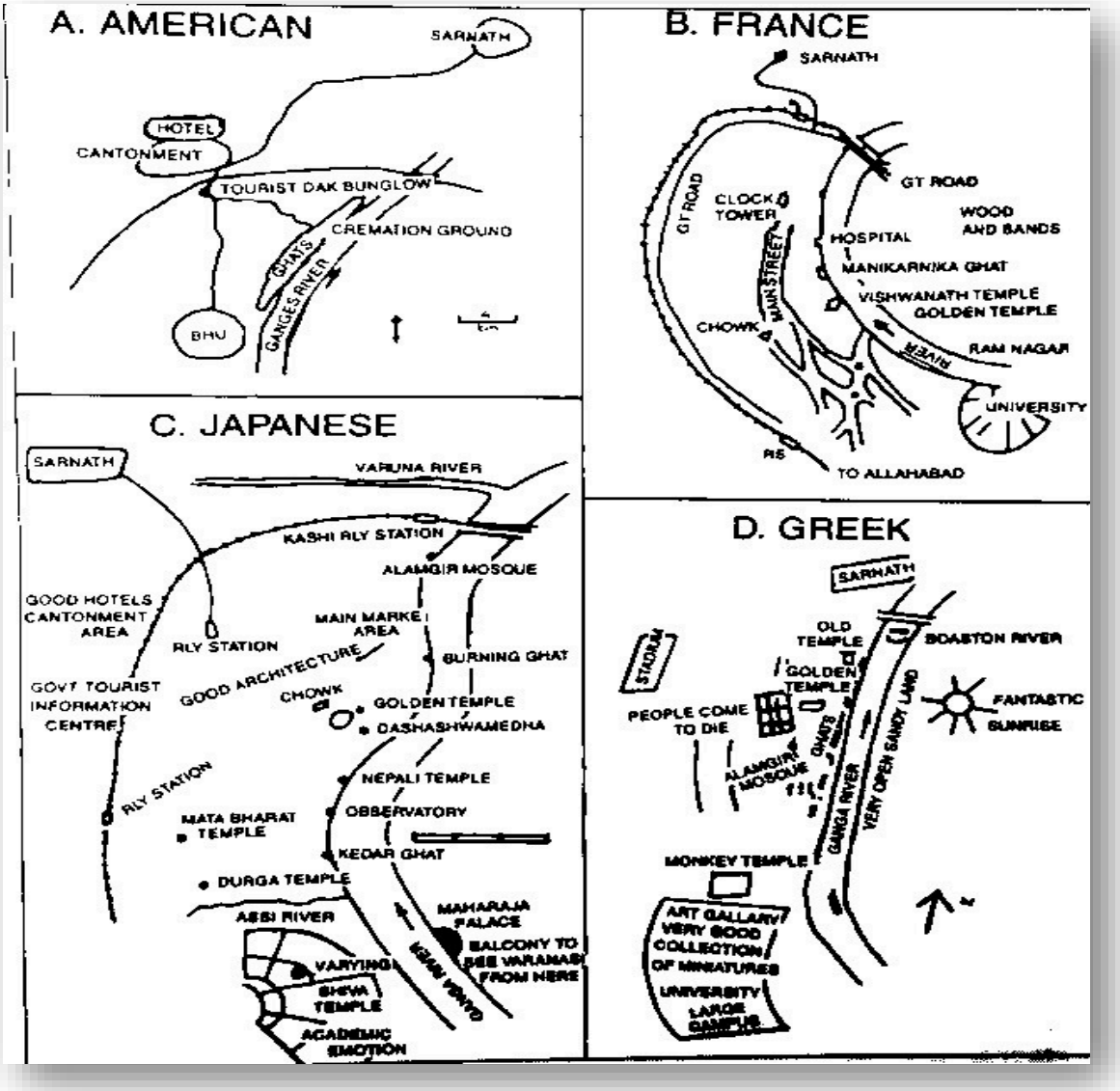
Varanasiwasoneofthoseforgottencities,yetnotoneofthem.

Despitetheyears,thechallenges,thethrashings,shehas remaineddifferent.Sheisstubborn,unique.Sherefusestodie, to beeffacedandtotaketodusts.

Shedecidedtoachieveperpetuityintimethroughaliberal policyofacceptingnewnorms,throughafreeadmixtureof ideasandblood.Varanasi,theorthodox,wasnotfanatic. Varanasiperseveredthroughthemostcatholicofcultures,the 'Siva-culture'.

Since thenVaranasihasbeenlookinguponchangesofthe passing culturesinhistory,-theGreek,theKusana,theMongol, the Hūna,thePathan,theMughal,andfinallyeventheEnglish.

IMAGES OF VARANASI:TOURIST SKETCHES



Map 2. Tourists' sketches of Varanasi: American, French, Japanese and Greek

The good old Lady nods her hoary head knowingly, sage-like, and reduces the enormity of cataclysmic upheavals to mere surface movements. She pushes her beleaguered head through tonnes of. debris, 'bloody but unbowed'.

She is overly happy that she, the old bones, could after all maintain her fort intact.

She the grandmother of mothers, accommodating all types of changes within her time-patched rags of ancient glory, and glittering garments of moving patterns of many faiths and cultures, continued, as of old, attending to her familiar chores of life, abounding and unending, nonchalant, undisturbed and profound.

As history passes, Varanasi smiles, and smiling survives the mutation of Time.

'Time the Fearsome' (Kala-Bhairava) is the Guardian Angel of Varanasi.

The life throb of other ancient cities touches us, if at all, very faintly. Names such as Tutenkhamen, Sargon, Gudea, Nebuchadnezzar, Assurbanipal, Shehrezadi,-the Hsias, the Chous, China-names that made history in the East and the West, soothe our chronicle- loving ears with faint melodies wafted from a very distant past. The sounds, and the associate pictures lift us away from our fevered existence and mental maladies, and carry us to other times and other livings. When man thinks of the past, unknown to himself, he permits himself the luxury of a little roominess, and advantage of spaciousness. The distant past breathes of romance and freedom.

The very unreal-real nature of past's hoariness covers over strained nerves with a kind of drugged dream.

But Varanasi in comparison is more hardy, sturdy, stable, and grotesquely stubborn. Varanasi is matter of fact, and a sheave of fiction. Varanasi is orthodox unorthodox. Varanasi is die-hard, stub- born, liberal and informal.

Varanasi 'is', because Varanasi has always been there, a mortally immortal city, a wounded defiance, a challenge to Time.

But the tragedy is that we have been living in poorer times, when piety is a dying cause, faith an anathema, and soul a haunting chimera.

The changes in our times have hit Varanasi hard; and in hitting Varanasi hard it has hit our soul. Our present has become a threat to our future. We had been accustomed to live in hopes. Now we live in fear and frustration.

Stunned by entirely undeserved heavy and fast blows from a stark modern technocratic system, humanity helplessly stands amidst a shambles of its dream palaces. The cherished hopes for Man lies in splinters like fallen chandeliers. Man gropes and grovels amidst the ruins of his own making, looking for a spark of light.

Harassed by fear, choked by sulphurous skies, haunted by planned but meaningless devastation and mass murders, organised by systems perfected through science, Man stands at a land's end, and faces a traumatic situation of cliff hanging brinkmanship.

And this is the kind of life we propose to bequeath our posterity. It is a future killed by the present.

We look for a god that is not. Like 'Jerusalem Undelivered' we look for a Varanasi that is not, and yet is.

We search for a faith lost through overspreading; and our widowed hopes reach for a new redemption named Varanasi.

Varanasi retains that lost soul, despite the thrashings she has undergone.

In searching for the lost Varanasi we search for our last souls.

II

As members of a community we naturally hold on to the ancient. Our past is our support, root, faith, bastion and escape at the same time. Our past is a dreamland we want to visit again and again.

But Varanasi is more than a belief and escape. It is as firm as a living faith. If we have to continue and live, once in life we have to feel in our fevered nerves the bygone spirit of Varanasi.

In the name Varanasi coexist peace and logic, the ancient and the living, fanaticism and liberalism. The lonely, the crowdy, the purifying, the petrifying, the elevating, the degrading, the stubborn, the relaxed, the firm, the crumbling all thrive side by side in Varanasi. Varanasi is Time's caravanserai.

Like love, Varanasi too has passed through its inevitable phases of wax and wan, new and old, dream and trance, faith and scepticism, life and death, promise and betrayal.

The price that modern life has been called upon to pay for a quiet simple existence is too dear. Dear because life has lost its essential value. Life is held too cheap.

But are not ruins the ideal fulfilment of all vaunted designs? Is not cynicism the ultimate of religious fervour? Ruins tempt and urge discovery. But is indeed discovery relevant? Homer's Odysseus-com- plex, so eloquently and picturesquely versed, finally touches a white truth that there is indeed nothing to discover. Man and nature basically remain unaltered.

Yet Varanasi demands discovery. In discovering Varanasi we dis- cover a human heritage, for of all the ancient prehistoric human habitations, Varanasi alone remains fresh and bustling, and com- pels attention.

Why?

Because in Varanasi the common man's good and evil has got so mixed up that it is difficult to pick clean values without colliding with the crossbreeds of ancient cants, and not too ancient credos. Varanasi's long history ideologically presents a sordid picture
of ruins of many futures. The durability of Varanasi's reputation is based on people's faith in reality of values. There is an allurement inherent in subjectivity of thinking. This
leads us to reflect on the interplay of belief and faith. In its turn, this again compels thought to determine the role of values in seek- ing a peaceful life.

Varanasi still assures and guarantees peace, the last quest of Man. Amidst all these contradictory but absorbing facets Varanasi, the Eternal, retains her undying virtue of continuity. It emanates a message that still lures the sick and the spirited, the demented and the meditative, the despaired and the reject, the scholarly and the religious, the idealist and the cynic.

This is why Varanasi still continues to be the most attractive and compulsive 'must' in a tourist's calendar and a pilgrim's itinerary. It is simultaneously a retreat for a recluse and a hermit, and a diversion for the eccentric and the pervert.

Weird sex, filthy lanes, indiscriminate crowds, vulgar decay, open raw filth rotting by baskets of flowers and trays of food,- verily Varanasi is a many-breasted Artemis.

At every twist and turn cats, curs, cows and crooks unconcernedly cohabit with priests, paupers, princes and prostitutes. By park-corners, lane-bends and river banks a thug dramatises, a bereaved weeps, a bull ambles by, or a mad man howls obscenities. A hearse passes, while a wedding procession merrily winds along, beating drums and blaring brass trumpets. Mad dervishes sing their charm- ing melodies. Bereaved widows howl their dirges. But unconcerned, the hot pastry sellers hawk their wares. A blind singer seeks a cop- per; a pious seeks a lingam; and a fraud looks for its latest victim.

Values brush shoulders in the labyrinthian past, and confusing present of Varanasi. The contemplative, the spiritual, the abnegated, the emancipated bathe in closest proximity with the dirty, the rus- tic, the beggarly, the sick and the maniac. Differences of sex and age, of sectarian exclusiveness and religious distinctions get merged in the constant flow of the blue waters, of the sacred Ganga,-cool, deep, perennial and primordial.

Varanasi is Ganga, Ganga is Varanasi.

Varanasi elevates, Varanasi depresses. Varanasi is free and gay. Varanasi is desperate and morbid.

Lumbering bulls, dilettante donkeys, degraded lepers, comic monkeys, coiling cobras, illusive soothsayers, pestering beggars, apa- thetic clairvoyants dreamily stream past the crowded lanes with supreme unconcern.

Varanasi rejects all forms.

Varanasi was born old. Age has not forsaken her; youth never touched her; time has not withered her; exposure has not robbed her of hidden charms.

No brush of Turner ever played on the mystiques of her river front. Cold cameras could not contain her soul, or cover her open- ness. Repetitions have failed to rob her of charms. Time has failed to make her go stale, lose her delicate savours, or pale her native hot tang.

The magic of Varanasi continues to bewitch equally a hard core urban cynic, a know-all university archaeologist, a philosopher, a scholar, a sage, a meditator, a nautch girl, and an enlightened saint.

Staying in Varanasi is a spell-stunned experience in a Time-capsule organised by a spiritual Hitchcock.

Over all these phases hangs of a powerful human drama, like the lighted ceiling of a modern theatre, the unseen but enlightened Angel of religion and piety. For in spite of whatever contrary has been said about it, man's urge for a religious relief is as true as man's response to pain. Steady devotion confers peace to a belea-guered soul.

As long as man would need survival, man would look for a religion of his own.

Religion is fundamentally the lonely man's only companion. Lone- liness is the ultimate of human living. Loneliness is a basic ingredi- ent for creativity. What man lives by in his lonelier hours is a man's personal religion.

Religion is a shrine of survival where man has to provide his own light.

The subjective idealism of religion alone has discovered, main-

tained and preserved the moral vista of values, without which religion's powerful authority would crumble to a handful of dust.

The overcrowded loneliness of Varanasi acts for the religious as a cave does for a yogi.

III

The natural obduracy of Varanasi refuses to submit to the humiliation of decay. She refuses to disintegrate like other cities of prehistory. She rejuvenates her virginity with each rape. Wrecks, under which a lesser would long have been buried, have actually been lifted by her into monuments of glory and added faith. Each wound inflicted on her body has smarted her to attain a heftier recovery and made her gain an added vigour. Recessions replenish her; deluges fertilise her; death reincarnates her.

The breathtaking nobility of her fantastic river-side-beauty has inspired poets to string verses, artists to draw and paint, music makers to sing, and photographers to gawk and shoot.

What Varanasi loses in not nursing a Turner, she retains in her cherished troupe of genuine scroll-makers. The meek scroll-

makers of Varanasi-lanes have not remained idle. Varanasi has no Strauss to record a Blue-Ganga. But the songs on the Ganga in Varanasi have been recorded from the primordial years in languages far more ancient than Sanskrit. The Vedas sang of the Sindhu and the Sarasvati; but Pali and Prakrta sang of the Ganga, the purifier of the degraded and of the outclassed, patita-pavani. She was called divyadhuni, the shaker of the celestials, and destroyer of the Vedic pride. No Apabhramsa branch of the vast subcontinent has missed to glorify the Ganga, the divine stream, the mother of rivers.

We feel both surprised and proud that the very name of Ganga (corrupted by foreigners into 'the Ganges') is derived from a language which had been the basic lingua franca of India, Munḍari. Much before the Vedic Sanskrit had superimposed its elitist sway over the common people of the subcontinent, 'Ganga' meant, as it still means, a 'river' in Munḍari (Ganga).

A legend recorded in the Mahabharata records that the most illustrious of the families of the Vedic Aryans in India had come out of the wombs of a Ganga-Girl, who must have been a non-Aryan, probably an unnamed Munḍari, for the subcontinent had been peopled with such indigenous communities as Munḍa, Bhara, Suir, Kol, Ho, Biror, Gond, etc., all considered under an omnibus name, the Nagas (the Dravidas, the Dasyus etc.). Songs on the Ganga and Varanasi are sung in all of these languages, most of them pre-Vedic. Some of the most touching songs on Ganga have been composed by Islamic poets.

While songs about the Ganga and Varanasi still continue to be sung in all the Indian languages, and even in dialects, pictorial records have been scarce due to ravages of time. This is not the case about sculptures. Ganga has been variously sculptured in

stone and terracotta. The two great and significant examples stray into my mind, the one in Mahabalipuram, and the other masterpiece in the Ellora cave.

But Varanasi and her artists maintained a tradition in painting. Most of the Varanasi artists of old as well as of today, had a passion for painting on the mud walls of their humble tenements. The tradition still is alive in Varanasi.

But whilst paintings on distant Tahiti's mud-walls have been preserved at great pains by a responsible people's government of the French Republic, the wall paintings of Varanasi have been cynically consigned to cold oblivion.

Elitism and á bureaucratic chill, together, make the most effective killer of any art forms.

Some modern artists have attempted to preserve the glories of the Varanasi panorama. One such artist, an obscure soldier from the warring camp of Sir Robert Fletcher (15 January 1765) has left a very valuable painting, of the early Varanasi panorama as seen from the Eastern bank. Sir James Prinsep (1831) has immortalised his brush by leaving to posterity his graphic sketches of the Varanasi life.

These valuable paintings describe Varanasi as stood at the end of the Mughal times. Fletcher's painting had been lying in total obscurity in England (probably carried by the painter). The Indian Historical Society having got the winds of the painting, acquired it; and it still hangs on the walls of the Victoria Memorial Museum in Calcutta as one of its proud possessions.

IV

But is that all? Has Varanasi no other prehistory?

Varanasi must have started her steps across prehistory hundreds of centuries away from the period of the so-called 'available records'. She must have started her fledgeling life before the mud builders of Harappa and Kalibangan had ever heard of the Aryan Menace.

The records of those doleful devastations, of the most complete and humiliating subjugation of one people by another have found expressions through Rgvedic rk-s, certain social norms, and certain coinages of Brahmanical invention.

The Mahabharata is one of our valuable source-books, where in a chronicle-form we could trace the story of this humiliation, ending up with not only usurpation of rights, property, women and even religious forms, but also with the formation of a social group known as the dasas, or semi-slaves and serfs. The habitual dearth of women amongst the advancing hordes was replenished by a system of taking women as prisoners, presenting them as valued gifts. "Born of any woman an Aryan's child was an Aryan", said the law-books.

But it would be a mistake to rely completely on the Epic in its present form because of the mutations and mutilations it has been subjected to over the years from the Bhargavas, a specialised group of scholars appointed for singing high of the Aryans at the cost of the indigenous people who were made to lie low.

We are forced to accept that the Epic is, ancient as it is, but a fragmented and re-narrated document of a much larger bulk, which has been purposely destroyed, mutilated, or simply given up for lost in course of time.

We are in doubt. We have reasons to doubt. Were these indeed lost?

It is pertinent to enter here into a digression and state that one of the students or disciples of Krsna Dvaipayana Vyasa, the writer of the epic (Vyasa is not a name, but a patronymic, an appellation that describes a 'school of studies', and a special form of narration of chronicles), known for his up-dating revolutionary thinking, and Yajnavalkya one of his students, came by a life-and-death controversy about the way things moved; and in utter disgust and anger the latter left the academy of Vyasa in protest.

Yajnavalkya, the Vedic protestant, organised his own academy with 'tribal'-s for his pupils. These were the Tittiras, a tribe with the patridge (tittira) as a bird totem.

Even in those days this must have been considered revolutionary. Yajnavalkya wanted to get rid of the connivance of the Bhargavas who added and subtracted from the age-old chronicle known as the Jaya, a fragmented form of which is the present Bharata, or Maha-bharata.

Whilst the Bhargavas kept to their games of playing with the text for edification of Brahmanism, Yajnavalkya kept himself busy in forging a weapon of much telling intent. This was the compilation of 'the Yajnavalkya Code of Social Conduct', which runs contrary to the codes of earlier law-makers, Manu, Atri, Visnu, Harita and Gautama (not the Buddha).

The 'Yajnavalkya Code' became very popular because it looked after the interests of the changing times, and reformed society. The people hailed it, for it made wide room for accommodating the original non-Aryans within the large Aryan commune.

The point is that even in those far away times, when the epic narrative had been laying its foundations, the Brahmanical slant, as opposed to the Vedic, had aroused protest; and Protestants to 'the cause' stood apart, and held their forte.

At any event the fact that the present Varanasi-range along the Ganga and the Varanasi ravine had been originally inhabited by a people of non-Aryan descent has been established by (a) stone implements characteristic of a Stone-Age culture; (b) special kinds of paltria and (c) toys discovered at different layers of excavation, which, incidentally go up to 14 layers.

This famous township still retains within its language, idioms, subtle turn of life-lure, clan, a typical non-Aryan freedom from form, and a spirit of total participation in social events. The Banarasi way (an euphemism for a happy-go-lucky, 'devil-may-care' non-Aryan way) still persists within its society, Hindu or Muslim. Such a 'rudely' frank exposition of life actually claims its descent from clans such as the Bhandas, Bharas, Suirs, and Avirs, all 'native' tribes, who lived in and around the hills and forests, now known as Varanasi.

We have to allow this fact to seep into the deepest recesses of our consciousness in order to appreciate why and how the ways and modalities of the Bhairavas, the Saivas and Tantras became synonymous with Kasi-ways, and why and how Kasi-Varanasi is regarded as the cradle and nerve-centre of Saiva rites.

The phenomenon has now been established by scholars.

As we are on this topic of interference with faithful recordings of events, we may refer to yet another significant anecdote contained in the Epic. This concerns the so-called appointment

of an animal- headed Gana-devata (the spirit of the people) with many hands, as a scribe, amanuensis, secretary-stenographer to the narrator Vyasa. (The animal head of the scribe need not confuse us, as it indicates the usual Aryan slant against totemic tribes and local people, the multiplicity of hands indicating popular participation of many hands, and synthesis of many forms.)

Meticulous scholars of the epic know that the story of the appointment of an amanuensis is in itself a clever subterfuge on the part of later interpolators for indicating the participation of the local's in actual chronicling. Mahabharata researchers raise a point, if the legend of the appointment of an amanuensis has not been mounted later.

In case it is indeed a mounted interpolation, then our doubts cast even deeper shades. The Brahmanical Bhargavite texts having had their run, had been so effectively challenged by the proletariat scholars that the hands of the 'mass spirit' of the Gana-devata put a stop to an extremely clever scheme.

We shall see by and by that Ganesa is actually the Yaksa king Kuvera's 'other form' as a strong guard for vindicating Siva's rights against Brahmanical thrusts.

This democratic intervention shows that the mutilation and interpolation of the original text was not allowed to go unchallenged.

In any case we could read between lines, and infer that the lost Jaya had contained glorified records of the non-Aryan people of the land. (Had that story been left intact, would the history of the Harappan culture and its script have remained a closed chapter to us?)

The records of Aryan repressions, and of the glories of a local people had to be eliminated from so important a document.

The Epic was reorganised to sing of the heroics of the new people who did not hesitate to propagate, and 'increase their tribe', by extensively using the local wombs of spicy beauties such as Matsya- gandha, Paramalocana, Ganga, Anjana, Kunti, Hidimba, Jambavati and many others. The systems of acceptance had to accommodate both anuloma and pratiloma unions (union between upper and lower classes.)

The very basis of the social class-systems, and the urgency with which this has been defended, could be traced to these intermixtures of peoples. Viewed from this angle, acceptance of the caste- system as an excuse for maintenance of the purity of blood appears to be both unrealistic and untenable. But as a handle to keep Brah- manism and the Brahmans at the tops, the system had proved to be extremely effective.

The bitter truth has to be swallowed, because the process of attri- tion was a long one, and varied; the truth could not be just wished away.

Hundreds of folklores, legends, stories, kathas bring back to us sad memories of the total destruction of many cities, many peoples, many villages, and subsequent occupation of the lands, and subjugation of the victims, keeping them as vassals, serfs, slaves, as suited the situation. Epics have been written on the theme. Gods have been made of men, who had planned these massacres and devastations, the like of which the world has not known since. (The burning of the Khandava forests, or the devastations in Janasthan are cases in point.)

Skeletons of strings upon strings of populated settlements are being now excavated all along the river valleys of the vast subcontinent. They expose a kind of devastation that belies Vedic claims to peace.

After the dusts of the mêlée lie settled, the streams of blood are allowed to fertilise the earth, and the war crises finally die out, we could take a second look at history, and find that the amazing Varanasi stands her ground unchanged and unchangeable. She Varanasi, the eternal, stoutly stands her guard.

No Aryan thrust could unlodge the grips of the Ganas on Varanasi. There are several anecdotes in support of this.

Those war-torn centuries, however, have left their marks in their own way, usually forgotten, but not undetectable.

The traditional honour to Ganesa (and that of Hanumanta, the Mahavira) is one of these. Varanasi has been placed under 'guards' of one series of Ganesa-s, and another series of a far more sinister and jealous nature. These are the Bhairava-Sivas. Together they guard the environs of ancient Varanasi as 'Witnesses' to those ravaging centuries.

There is yet another set of shrines peculiar to Varanasi. These are half-accepted, half-spurned. These are the very popular 'Bir' shrines, number of which dominate localities all over Varanasi. These indicate non-Aryan antecedents, and even today these are extremely popular amongst the folks who are considered to belong to the lowest ranks of the caste and outcaste ladder.

Matsya Purana (183.66) refers to the King of the Ganas/Yaksas to have been accommodated by Siva as his main 'guard', when

he was turned into Ganesa. This shows that Ganesa was a Yaksa, or a deity of the pre-Aryans.

We come to this topic later. Here we only note that Siva's control over Kasi against the Aryan thrust is still recalled by the many Ganesas spread all over Varanasi. (We shall return to this topic.)

The Vedas and the Puranas are full of the accounts of these bloody feuds. So far as Varanasi is concerned we hear of the flights of Puspadanta, Ekadanta, Kalabhairava, Vakratunda, Nandikesa, Dandapani, coming down to Pratardana, Pradyota, Divodasa, the Haihayas and Ksemaka. Agni Purana and the Kasikhanda section of the famous Skanda Purana narrate accounts of the battles. Up to the end of AD 998 the Haihaya-Kalacuri and Pratihara wars kept Kasi menaced.

But the Vinayakas, Bhairavas, Ganesas, Kalesvaras of Varanasi project distinctly a pattern of life and devotion, which was quite contrary to the Vedic. This is also projected by the different sects: the Vaisnavas, the Saivas, the Ganapatyas, the Bhairavas, the Nathas, the Tantrikas. We shall have to meet these sects and their centres later.

These and many other references in the Puranas and Hindu Law treatises obliquely point out to those years of feuds when one kind of social system was being transplanted by another. Stratification of class tiers rose out of the class consciousness of the occupying force who made very determined and organised efforts keeping the vic- tims under serfdom, or even worse.

Thus fought the indigenous denizens, the autochthons of the sub- continent against the inroads of the Aryan menace. The

victors tried hard to impose their own gods on those of the victims, e.g., nature and totem gods, like the rivers, the trees, the mountains, the earth, brooks and streams and springs, the souls of the dead, and the fears of a looming mysterious fate.

Be that as it may, the Dravidians, Ganas, or Dasyus, or Raksasas or Yaksas, as we called the autochthons, had their moment of the last laugh. More than eighty per cent of what we observe today as the religious format of the land of the Sindhus (Hindus) is but what we have accepted and adapted from the victims of the victors. Hinduism of today is but a phonetically comprised form of Sindhuism. And when we scratch the skin of Hinduism, the underlying major trends and ritualistic forms remind us of non-Vedic indigenous ob-servances.

V

All through this attrition, Varanasi continued to be where she had been. By the river Ganga, serene and composed, she continued to nestle the tired, protect the harassed, shelter the fugitive, cleanse the ailing and compose the ruffled.

Talk of Venice, Florence, Geneva, or Lucerne, talk of the picture of London as such from the Thames, or New York from the New Jersey heights, or of Edmonton from the other bank of the river,- no riverside township could match Varanasi's beauty and grandeur. Like the Taj amongst the buildings, Venus de Melo amongst the famous marbles, Varanasi's beauty stands out as an experience, a realisation, a sensation for the connoisseur. Wordsworth was justified writing 'Earth has nothing to show more fair' only because he had never seen the fairer Varanasi from the river on a sprouting winter's dawn.

It must take a whole lot of determination and strength of mind to overcome the massive spell that Varanasi could cast, and yet keep one's cool. The lost procession of centuries actually appear to be seeping out of the stones, and towers of the temple minarets. The brass bells knell aloud in waves of ringing echo- es from nowhere. The pilgrim gets wrapped up in a historical and cultural milieu much in the same way as a dilettante tourist would, walking the winding lanes of Rome or of Venice, Florence, or even of the pretty town- ship of Salzburg. Varanasi overwhelms with her prehistory.

The squalor, the rot, age old tradition of trickery and fraud, the time honoured syndrome of priestly greed and beggary, the un- spotted odours, the garish crowds, the festering disowned of the earth, the philosophic bulls and the grinning monkeys, the exhibi- tional python or cobra, the fortune-telling birds, excellent man-ani- mal coexistence within fighting inches of crawling space, all crowd upon the mind, and test and tax the strongest will-force of the most determined of the brave souls. The catch of the place prevents one from seeking a quick retreat to more familiar surroundings, where the suffocating weight of the many dark centuries could be cast away.

Varanasi bemuses with its thrall. One would like to run away from it all, but having run away would again come here to feed a nostalgia which is romantic in its stark realities and realistic in its roman- tic orientalism.

Only the bravest could stand these metamorphic changes in a spinning time-tunnel.

The unexpected mix-up of the familiar-unfamiliar, past-present, history-life shock untrained minds with a whirlwind

series of the unheralded, engaged, as it were, in ghostly dances alternating with thrilling divine experiences.

Varanasi is a tourist's challenge, a pilgrim's nerve-wrecker, a poet's pocket book, and a vagabond's paradise. Varanasi is an extension of man's capacity for quick adjustments.

Varanasi is an art album, a museum of oddities, a sanitary inspector's notebook, a gourmets' Elysium.

Varanasi is the ultimate abode of the sick of mind, the engaging companion of the forlorn in spirit-yesam anya gatir nasti tesam Varanasi gatiḥ. Varanasi offers a way to those who are lost to all other ways. Here the absurd attains sublimity, and a savant reaches the coveted point of self-sought stillness.

2

The Changing Panorama

Speaking of Varanasi, are we sure where indeed the city is situated? In fact was Varanasi at all a city? If not, since when it gained that status?

Then, where is Kasi? That too is a crying question. Are Kasi and Varanasi identical? Are they twin cities like Howrah-Calcutta, St. Paul-Minneapolis?

According to the Puranas, and the Jaina-Buddha texts, Kasi and Varanasi appear to be two different places. Varanasi a holy hill was covered with wooded lands, washed by several brooks and streams and embellished by large tanks as well.

Varanasi was the powerful fortified capital of the age-old jana-pada (district) of Kasi-Kosala.

Besides Kasi and Varanasi, we hear of four other descriptive appellations: Anandakanana, Gauripiṭha, Rudravasa and Mahasmasana. Where could these be identified and located?

If the locations are different, then which one of them is earlier? If these are historical realities, then our enquiry is pertinent.

In the Jatakas we come across many more names of Kasi. Of those by and by.

Or could we brush away these names as mere myths?

But even myths are not supposed to be totally unreal or, baseless. What is totally unreal cannot enjoy a lease of life as long as fifty centuries. Myths, according to Graves and Gopinath Kaviraj are camouflaged forms of history, preserved in a colourful symbolic language, for the benefit of educating the mass. Myths serve as a cultural mind-bank for students of sociology.

II

For finding out the ancient site of Varanasi we have to study critically all types of references and artifacts still available to us. We have to investigate the Vedas, the Samhitas, the Jaina-Buddha texts (particularly the Jatakas), the Puranas, the Epics, travellers' reports, leg- ends, and of course a close study of the ruins and monuments still available for scrutiny.

Of course the Varanasi, which had been the holy of holies to hermits, seers and spiritualists, used to be a hilly woodland carefully tucked away from the hurry and heat of life.

It had always been there, known to the indigenous autochthons, i.e., the established pre-Aryan communities, natives to the soil, and generally referred to as Dravidas by anthropologists, and Dasyus, Danavas, Nagas, even Asuras, Yaksas and Raksasas by Vedic literature. These have also been referred to by the

omnibus term 'Gana- Naga', as used in the Epics, and the Puranas.

Varanasi was popular to the linga-worshipping Nagas, and Dravidas, locally known as Bharas, Bhandas and Suirs.

All in all the Nagas and Ganas maintained a great regard for Varanasi much before the Aryans had ever heard of it.

The mysterious Aryans [Airayas (Avesta), (Iranian Rock Inscrip- tion)] who could have been very close to the forgotten Hittites of the Asia Minor, moved for whatever reasons towards parts of Asia and Europe. These Indo-Aryan clan-bands moved towards the for- midable Hindukush, and eventually crossed it. The mighty Sindhu shocked and challenged them, and they began to pray to its might. This could have taken place 5500 years back or more. They came in different flocks or hordes: Madras, Parasa-s, Saka-s, Bharata-s, Kasya-s or Kasyapa-s, Vasa-s, Turaba-s, etc., as these were called. They settled in the 'Land of Five Rivers'.

Their date about reaching India has been differently claimed as 3500 BC, 2500 BC.1

They came to settle in the Indus valley, and met a superior culture which seriously challenged their intrusion. By 2500 BC the indigenous culture was superseded by the aggressors. However, they remained for a long time in the valleys of the Sindhu and the Sarasvati, which they eventually crossed (after having reduced that area to a desert because of heavy deforestation, which they had caused, and after seeing the Sarasvati 'hide up' into the sands).

They reached further East until they reached the verdant valleys of Madhyamika or Kusavarta, i.e., the Ganga and the Yamuna, par- ticularly the Sadanira (Gandaki).

Their progress was never unchallenged. The local population, mentioned rather scornfully as Asuras, Dasyus, Danavas, even Raksasas and Yaksas put up great fights. The Rgveda mentions about the superior cultures of these natives

One of the most populated areas, and one dearly loved by the natives was the forested hills of Varanasi on the Ganga. The lovely forests and, orchards (described in the K. Kh.) watered by the rivers Asi, Godavari, Mandakini, Dhutapapa, Kirana and Varana ap- peared to the original inhabitants as a piece of crystallised heaven where they presumably freely practised their native religious adora- tion of Pasupati and the Mother.

The Vedic people, who knew of no Mother, no Purusa-Prakrti syn- drome, called this kind of worship as the Rudra (fierce) way, and termed the mystic hills as Rudravasa, 'the abode of the fierce peo- ple', or Mahasmasana, that is to say, that it was a part of the country, which, because of its weird ways with the dead bodies, was no better than an extensive crematory ground, with Pisacas, Siddhas, Vetalas and Ganas (non-Aryan communities) as its residents.

Rudras have been regarded as anti-Vedics in the Rgueda. But in the Satapatha Brahmana the Rudras are found to be coexisting with the Vedics.

Rudravasa as a name for Varanasi could be a reminder to these events. Similarly the name Mahasmasana referred probably to extensive crematory grounds lying along the hills and the

banks, and infested by the Rudras, the meat-loving fierce people, shunned by the Aryans.

That the Vedics and the Rudras continued to indulge in fierce fights has been fully corroborated by narratives in the Vedas as well as in the Puranas. Varanasi maintained and still maintains a stern posture of anti-Vedism by upholding the Rudra ways. It justifies its name Mahasmasana and Rudravasa.

Varanasi certainly appears to be pre-Vedic, and certainly the Aryans came to this haloed spot much in the same manner as they had arrived on the banks of the Ganga. The Aryan acceptance of Varanasi as a holy place appears to have been a much latter event than their acceptance of such places as Naimisaranya, Dvaitavana, Kamyakavana, Puskaravati, the Sarasvati and Kuruksetra.

This was not the case of Varanasi. Records about how it had all started, though covered in half-myths, are rather clear about the foundation of a Kasi-Lunar-dynasty. (It is remarkable, however, that none speaks of Varanasi, as a synonym for Kasi in this context.)

From those pre-Vedic days to the days of the Sharqui sultans of Jaunpur (Jamadagnipuram) [destroyed by Firoz Shah Tughlaq (along with Sravasti), and renamed Jaunpur, in the name of his cousin Jauna, the future Muhammad Tughlaq (1447)], Kasi (not Varanasi) flourished as an important Hindu janapada, or State.

References to Kasi go back to the earliest Veda-Purana documents. Jaina and Buddha records too attach importance to the en- tire Kasi-Kosala region which includes Ayodhya, Dattatreyaksetra (modern Ghazipur), and certainly

Markandeya (modern villages of Kaithi and Bhitri near Varanasi), situated near the confluence of the Gomati and the Ganga.

Kasi has been referred to in (a) the Rgveda, (b) Paippalada Sam- hita, (c) Satapatha Brahmana, (d) Brhadaranyaka Upanisad, where Gargi, calls Ajatasatru, king of Kasi and Videha, (e) Sankhayana Srautasutra, where Jaṭa-Jatakarni has been mentioned as a priest of the Kasi kings, (f) Baudhayana Srautasutra which mentions Kasi and Videha as neighbouring places, (g) Gopatha Brahmana which mentions Kasi-Kosaliya, (h) Aitareya Brahmana, which puts KasI much earlier than 1000 BC.

This of course suggests a pre-Vedic existence of Kasi. Varanasi must have been yet a much earlier place, where recluses and her- mits used to meditate, or take formal spiritual classes.

Besides the above references in Vedic literature, Kasi finds significant mention in the Puranas: (a) Bramha Purana; (b) Vayu Purana; (c) Skanda Purana devote special sections on Kasi, Kasikhanda contains valuable informations on Kasi.

From these chronicles we come to know of the foundation of the beginning of the Lunar Princes of Kasi (Manu, Buddha, Pururavas, Kasa). Kasa is supposed to be seven generations away from Pururavas, a Vedic personality.

However sweeping and vague, these references establish the following: (a) Kasa's Kasi was much more ancient than the Epics and the Puranas. An earlier city could have been renamed by Kasa in his name, much as other princes have renamed cities, e.g., Allahabad, Daranagar, Aurangabad, Ganganagar, etc. (b) The presence of a township between the Ganga-Varana

confluence in the south, and the Ganga-Gomati confluence in the north was a fact which takes us further back from the times of the Aryan push. (c) After this we come to the sumptuous times of the great Epics where Kasi-Varanasi has been eloquently described again and again, the two names of- ten losing their individual distinctions. Kasiraja was regarded as a powerful ally by all the rulers of the times.

The fixing precise dates of the Puranas, in spite of hard labours of scholars, has remained elusive. But discriminating investigators take the period to be between the times of the Vedic Aranyakas, and Gautama Buddha. Some of the Puranas show signs of the period of later Muslim intrusions. (These would have been composed between fourth and twelfth centuries AD.)

This investigative conclusion is based on certain facts. Antiquities of the Puranas have been traced to some of the Vedic texts.* of course Kasi-Varanasi has been mentioned 'together' as an important janapada-nagari both in the Manusmrti and in the Mahabharata. Evidences like these could not be neglected in this context. Puranas are important documents. Chandogya calls the Puranas as the Fifth Veda, and Smrti accepts them as popular com- mentaries on Vedic truths. Poet Banabhatta of Kashmir (seventeenth century AD) mentions the Puranas with due respect.

Thus we see that in considering the antiquities of Varanasi Puranas provide important informations. So do the Jatakas, which are filled with references to both Kasi and Varanasi, which is called Isipattana or Rsipattana. Another Buddhist text, Dhammapada Attakatha mentions Varanasi-Isipattana as

different from Mrgadava-Sarnath. This is a notable information for our research.

Finally, we have the records left by pilgrims and travellers. Fa-Hien, Hiüen Tsang, both Chinese, Megasthenes, the Greek ambassador at the court of Chandragupta Maurya, and Al-Biruni, the great Islamic savant, all have mentioned Kasi and Kosala as different places. So does the Arthasastra of Kautilya.

IV

Kasi the city was completely destroyed by wars and feuds of religious bigotry. After the devastation caused by Muhammad Ghori (1194) and Qutbuddin Aibak, Kanauj and Kasi had become a lost memory.

But the trading interests of towns like Kanauj and Kasi forced the business community to shift for other suitable centres, close to the former areas of operation. Thus between Varanasi, Kasi and Kanauj various smaller villages grew up as scattered centres for trade. These trade centres gave rise to small townships, which dot all the way between Varanasi and Ghazipur, keeping always close to the Ganga.

This lost Kasi has now become the subject matter for scholarly investigations, and a point of curiosity to antiquity hunters.

In course of time their efforts succeeded, their greatest achievement being the marvellous discovery of Mrgadava-Sarnath which lies partially discovered. But much of the environs still call for continued efforts. A heavy, blanket of dusty silence covers untold number of precious mines which store further knowledge about the lost Kasi.

Rediscovery of ancient Kasi has been rendered difficult by continuous destruction spreading over a long period. What took 1600 years to loot and destroy (500 BC to AD 1100) must take a long and persistent organisational effort to reveal and reset. Discovery of Kasi has not been started yet.

The rediscovery of Varanasi, which is supposed to be a living city, has not become easier through periodical destructions suffered in more recent times. Such destructions are generally ascribed to the Islamic foreigners alone; but the greatest factor that completely had upset, and obliterated the very layout of Varanasi beyond any recognition, has to be clearly named. This is the English factor.

Indeed so persistent has been the sad and mindless destruction, that the ancient woodland, famed for its sages, scholars and hermits finally disintegrated. Most of the important shrines and ashramas sought safer places to hide. Many of the former revered deities, mentioned in the scriptures, were moved to hideouts too.

The temple of Visvanatha attracted the special wrath of the iconoclasts. It was situated on the highest point of the township, and its wealth offered a tempting loot.

This temple was time and again demolished, as it was reconstructed again and again. The temple of Visvanatha had become a battle-ground between forces of destruction and the stubbornness of the pious.

It had a history of its own.

Nearly about 1018 the city of Kanauj (Kanyakubja), the most prosperous glittering city of Asia of its time, was razed to the ground by the forces of Mahmud Ghazni. Since then the

destruction and pil- lage of Hindu, Jain and Buddhist temples became a regularity with the invaders. Under the pretext of religion the sack of Hindu temples meant for them, money, power and land benefits. Even monasteries and schools did not escape the zeal of the invaders.

V

A tragic side-effect of these destructions was the problem of forced conversions. At the beginning the convert nursed a keen desire for a come back to his fold, and for acceptance by their relatives and friends.

But this did not happen at all.

Apart from scriptural objections against conversions in general, the Hindus could not either (a) convert Muslims into the Hindu faith, or (b) re-convert their converted cousins and relatives back into their fold, on pain of death. Further, more no Hindu could marry a Muslim into his faith, and such marriages had to be functioned on pain of death under Islamic shari'at.

The laws left practically no choice to the Hindus. Once converted, they stayed converted.

The converts, incensed by the unfair scorn of their cousins, and cruel rejection by their ancestral society, grew into a band of yet more determined destroyers, inclusive of holy sites. In breaking the temples, actually they tried to tear the harsh purist social fabric to pieces. These were their own people who could have managed to show them reasonable consideration, in spite of the laws. They expected a sympathetic community life, which was, surprisingly and shockingly, denied to them.

The existing communal tension in the subcontinent is traceable to this fratricidal tension built up between Indians and Indians. Later foreigners had to play little part in it, except to nurse it, and fan it for their economic and political gain. The suicidal trend, unfortunately, has not stopped since.

This fact is observed by closely following a social pattern. It points out to a special nature of population distribution in various unsettled settlements of Varanasi. It seems quite remarkable that in Varanasi of today, in and around the ancient holy sites, where large scale destruction had once taken place, colonies after colonies of the early converts, the rejects of a proud and stern society, still struggle together for an existence which had been forced upon them by agents of social tyranny. They still manage to live side by side with a mixture of the local Hindus, who traditionally had been their erstwhile cousins.

Today they eke out a sparse living as they did in the remote past by carrying on their ancestral trades and industries. Most of them belonged to the manufacturing guilds once-famed throughout the civilized world from China to Rome for their fine handicrafts. Although pushed aside by their erstwhile brothers into separate pock- ets of society, they still carry on their traditional trades and occupa- tion. They still manufacture articles from silk, cotton, brass, ivory, bronze, gold, silver, copper, wood, even cane, grass and lacquer. It is remarkable that most of the stone and marble images of Hindu deities are the handiwork of these converted Muslim sculptors.

From times immemorial Kasi traders and Varanasi craftsmen have been the traditional builders of a special social elan which has remained unchanged in spite of changes of religious loyalties.

To usurp and encroach upon lands belonging to the temples, and then build for free accommodation gradually, has become synonymous with the automatic rights of the forced converts. For, the defeated, in their remorse and fear, not only kept away from the temples, but also abandoned rights on the attached lands. They abandoned the rights of even raising their voice against vandalisation of the beautiful carved stone artifacts which were freely carried away, and used for embellishment of private and public properties like mosques and palaces.

Nonetheless, the convert artisans still hug on to these areas which were rendered vacant after the devastating sack forced upon them by hurricane assaults which eroded their social identity.

Such turns and twists in history have inevitably left scars on the lives of the people. Failing to turn elsewhere, they found it safer to settle wherever they could, and grab for themselves a little living space snatched from the absent and cold Hindus.

Acts such as demolishing places of worship for collection of ma- terials for building new ones; filling holy tanks for reclaiming a few acres of land for housing, squatting, encroaching, ravaging, appear to have become almost traditional preoccupations for these colonies of converts. They stake their claims on the lands of the ruined temples as their legitimate war property, and often put up old documents signed by the then rulers as their title to the acquired battle gifts. Many of the claims rested on their legal deeds held before they had been converted. Most of the Muslims in Varanasi actually enjoy ancestral rights over property.

Such uncontrolled forces of demolition and reconstruction have not been of much assistance to scholars who are in search of the old Varanasi and its religious environments.

But as a community, the Muslims of Varanasi by themselves have been quite liberal in accepting the moral values of their age-old social environs. They find it a pleasure to display their Islamic brotherhood and hospitality, and live in the best of relations with their neighbours.

A deeper look into any of the Muslim neighbourhoods of Hindu Varanasi reveals the pleasant truth that the communities live in a close compact, almost cheek by jowl, each extending camaraderia to protect the interest of the other, although they maintain meticulously their divide of religious and social norms.

A tradition of respect for different communities is a precious heritage that still characterises the behaviour of the people of Oudh, ancient Kasi-Kosala. Muslim rulers of Lucknow, Rampur, Jaunpur have been, by and large, examples of accommodation of this social spirit.

VI

Not the Buddhist, not the Muslims, not even the atrocities of the foreign conquerors have been responsible for eroding the ancient esprit de corps of the Kasi-milieu. No catastrophe had affected the ancient character of Varanasi so radically as did the few sad and negative years of the proud imperious alien English. Insularity was a synonym for survival for these islanders. Intolerance and arrogance provided for them a stance for effective loot in the name of administration.

They plundered the most, rifled the most, carried the fortune away to build their society across the seas by draining the resources of India. But they did it so deftly under the protective excuse of their laws that they escaped successfully any indictment in a court of law. It was a case of legal brigandage unique in the history of the world.

They missed the continental spirit, and fared miserably in comprehending the sensitive acceptive catholic mores of a continental people. The typical English mind was incapable of evaluating, com- prehending and assimilating the diverse ways in which the medley of the people of this largest continent, especially of the people of the Indian subcontinent, lived in the harmony of the human spirit.

Because India proved to be too big for their schemy management, like dogs and lions managing large hunks off a carcass, they decided to tear up a great people to convenient sizes and swallow the whole thing in their own good time. The dogs did as much as the lions did, but always legally. Law of course is an ass.

Asia, the cradle of civilisation and culture, had always lived with the many, with workable understanding and a spirit of coexistence. But this spirit was quite foreign to the British passion for swift ag- grandisement and clever exploitation. Victimisation through humili- ating the conquered, and an incorrigible passion for glory and power, permanently alienated a group of erstwhile welcome merchants.

Whereas the destruction caused by Islam in Varanasi was inspired by human cupidity and religious bigotry, the havoc caused by the English was the result of a deep and damning

imperial scorn that the arrogant always nurse against their victims and serfs. Prompted by an avaricious greed, these land-pirates carried on their nefarious activities in the name of a good and stable government.

The freedom and democracy that they boasted of was a thing meant for their island-community. As rulers of the darkish Asians, they encouraged a policy of divide and rule, tear and swallow, cleverly disguised under a masque of high justice. They lived by a show of scorn, insolence and swagger. Scourges like the Hunas, Taimur, Mahmud, Nadir or Abdali are but bad dreams of history. They came like midnight. They left with a new sunrise. But these (Hyder Ali called them 'rats') never left, until they were forced to.

Whereas the Islamic rulers of Lucknow left on their subjects the tradition of neighbourliness, art and liberalism, the rulers from the British isles have left to India the dismal heritage of communal dis- harmony, riots and mutual sectarian mistrust.

Indian history never before the British knew of communal riots.

In spite of that poison, Varanasi and its mixed society still maintains its social calm, which is as placid and sedate as the blue cur- rents of the quiet Ganga, as firm and solid as the rocks on which the ancient retreat of Anandakanana, and the present city of Varanasi still rest.

VII

The defeat of Warren Hastings at the hands of Chet Singh (1781), the ruler of Varanasi, provoked the white aggressor, who, as be- comes a genuine upstart, was entirely incapable of comprehending the mores of the scion of an ancient royal house. The whiteman's defeat at the hands of what he

considered to be a native princeling, a mere feudal chief, hurt his arrogant vanity. The spell of British invincibility was rudely shaken at the clumsy hands of a native.

With the help of some ill-advised poor quislings he made his second attempt, and finally succeeded. Though Varanasi was finally humiliated and raped, yet the earlier defeat, like a constant barb, made Hastings deal with the town in a manner which the people of today cannot even comprehend.

The final destruction of Varanasi by the English was carried on through the helping hands of 'expert' foreign engineers and town- builders with little or no knowledge of handling antiquities, history and honoured sites of an ancient seat of learning.

Indian antiquities to them, any way, were of less importance than the stones and slabs of Westminster, or of Worcester, or Tintern churches.

Whereas the Muslims had a deeper appreciation of the Hindu norms (since these were in fact, but the erstwhile Hindus converted to another faith) being people of the same land, origin and blood, the Christian rulers in contrast, found no reason at all to respect the holy monuments, the sacred baths, the seats of learning, the wooded hermitages. The quiet and beautifying rivers that flowed through the famous woodland of Varanasi were deliberately choked and flattened to provide broad access for the 'sightseers' to the riverside, so that Europeans could travel 'safely and comfortably' un- der liveried protection on wheeled carriages.

No, not the Buddhist zeal, not the Muslim bigotry, not the molestation of Tartars and Kusanas, not the rapacity of the

plunderers, Varanasi was 'not' destroyed by any of these factors: Varanasi was destroyed by the calculated mischief and erratic town-planning of English administration.

Varanasi was destroyed by the perfidy of the self-serving imperial myopic agents of Great Britain, representing the economic stranglehold of the East India Company, particularly by its vainglorious agents like Warren Hastings, Clive, Vansitart, Barlow, Impey particularly by Warren Hastings, whose pride had been hurt by a 'mere' native prince, Chet Singh.

That imperialistic contempt eroded Varanasi's ethos and individuality. Today Varanasi is not even a ghost of the ancient Ananda- kananam. The entire psyche had quailed under a repressive alien heartless administration. The legendary township was suffering from a metamorphic trauma.

That real Varanasi was gone. Hence the question of its rediscovery. It is a civic and moral responsibility for every student of history and culture to try to see and feel the Varanasi that was, and is no more.

The so called benign rule of the islanders had completely changed the topography and panorama of the wooded hills on which rested the pre-Vedic holy woodland of Rudravasa and Anandakananam, the abode of Siva and Saivism.

That was the Varanasi of Kasikhanda, Agni Purana, Vayu Purana, the Mahabharata, the Jatakas, and of the records of Hiuen Tsang, Fa-Hien, Al-Biruni and of the ancient poets who have been singing about its glories.

But that Rudravasa is no more. It has been overrun the lost city of Varanasi. Forced by continuous ravages Rudravasa was

forced to seek shelter under a new name, Varanasi, which still maintained the smooth spirit of Anandakananam.

Much like refugees seeking shelter elsewhere after their total loss, the Kasi refugees stuck to the body of Varanasi, which by scriptural injunctions had been reserved as a place 'out of bound' for the householders. The tranquil calm that was the special attraction of Anandakananam was soon exploded, and a struggling mass took over whatever space was available to them. The entire Varana-Rajghat front was urbanised up to the slopes of the Visvanatha hill and Jnanavapi. The ancient face of Varanasi was undergoing a deep change.

The soul of Anandakananam suffered from a debasement of the inner spirit.

For whatever reasons, half political, half ignorant, half philosophic cynicism, the city fathers of today turn a Nelson's eye to these gradual destructions, or to the crying needs of putting a halt to the vandal- ism, and start retrieving a past, and reconstructing a future.

Varanasi, the oldest city on earth, famed for its quiet and spiritual élan, for its ashramas, hermitages, retreats, meditation centres, schools, hospitals,-Varanasi, known for its ponds, lakes, rivers and rocks, is still being dishonoured, raped and disfigured. Varanasi has been reduced to an overcrowded market-place, where the devout is just indulged because the civic panthers cannot do without their sweat-soaked coppers, which pour and pour as devotional offerings from all over India.

The City-fathers appear to have decided to let Varanasi take the way of the lost cities of Nineveh, Tyre, Taksasila and Nalanda.

The present Varanasi has been losing its solid and special character through continuous streams of refugees, and fraudulent political bunglings. The new rush from the displaced rural population as well as from the onrushing factory workers, and above all, from, the steady visits of pilgrims and sightseers has not helped much to keep Varanasi quiet and clean.

Expansion of modern facilities for communication has been work- ing against the interests of Varanasi, and against the preservation of its individuality. That legendary peace for which Anandakananam was famed, has fled, and in its place prevails blind orthodoxy and mean cupidity.

Ancient Varanasi's bloated body, still, however, keeps floating on the sea of Time, unrecognisable, but still the body of the venerated past.

But it is a greater tragedy that the spirit of Varanasi has long since evaporated, leaving behind a mutilated carcass.

Today Kasi-Varanasi of old has encroached upon the older

Anandakananam. Although Varanasi has retrieved her ancient name, after the Indian Independence, from the corrupted appellation of Banaras, yet she has lost her essence, her spirit. Rudravasa is a distant echo, Anandakananam a mere dream.

The ancient woodland is gone; the urban Varanasi has taken over,

and a busy city carries on its hectic commerce where sages used to come for peace, and anchorites for meditation.

Neither Kasi, nor Varanasi lives up to its ancient form and

glory. This is perhaps as it should be. There is an inscrutable law of life that old order of things must give way to the rolling

wheels of Time. Under Time's wheels all vaunt is grist. Things which had been, must eventually become the things that never again would be. Though regrettable, this is indeed inevitable. No mortal structure could boast of standing up to Time. By the immutable law of physical mutability Varanasi too must go the way of all flesh, and disintegrate.

VIII

Kasi had gone to the dusts centuries back. Old Sanskrit records are filled with the chronicles of these destruction. Under continuous thrashings of the times of Nikumbha, Ksemaka, Divodasa, Pratardana I, Pratardana II, Ajatasatru, Prasenjit and others, under the pressures built up through the protracted feuds of the Ganas and the Vaisnavas, the Rudriyas and the Kapalikas, ancient Varanasi had been deeply molested and scarred.

K. Kh. clearly chronicles these feuds, which are confirmed by conventional history books. Whereas these feuds could be described as the results of aggressiveness of one culture over another, one form of religious belief on another, in historical times the feuds have been turned to political battles. These are still being carried on. From the time of Bhisma, who fought with Kasiraja, to the times of Ajatasatru, Prasenjit, the houses of Pratardana, Haihayas, Satavahanas and Gahadavalas, Kasi has always been occupying the centre of Bharatiya history.

The Islamic invasions came much later. In fact Kasi's safety was exposed to foreign aggressors specially after the defection of Jaipal of Kasi under the forces of Qutbuddin, a general of Shahabuddin Ghori (1194) of Kabul.

James Prinsep refers to someIslamic records which casually mentions that Kasi was beingruled by a prince named Bonar, who was defeated by MahmudGhazni in 1117.

By that time Varanasi had already changed its location, so had Kasi. Of the most ancient ofthe monuments of that ancient Kasi, Sarnath alone stands asareminder

3

Sarnath

Who had really destroyed Sarnath? One fanatic sect at one time, or many such at many times? It is a highly controversial point. Sarnath and its environs now stand deserted. The ruins present us with evidence stretching from 500 BC to the end of the twelfth century. About 600 BC Hiuen Tsang had found it intact. Kumaradevi, a princess of the Licchavi clan, and Queen of King Govindacandra Gahadavala of Varanasi (a very powerful and accomplished ruler of his clan) had embellished it by her gifts.

Who then brought about the disaster? It must have happened (a) after 600 BC, and (b) through non-political motives. Was it due to religious bigotry? But it could not have been Islamic. Who then or what was responsible for the catastrophe?

Any way, the disaster did not come in a day, in a year, in many years. It must have come much before the Islamic disaffection. In fact at the peak of the cataclysmic raid of the foreigners Sarnath had already been turned into a ghost habitation, where, according to rumours, only devils and demons kept their nocturnal dances.

Not unlikely, the place had been infested with weird followers of the Vajrayana and Paisaca rites, and the simple folks were likely to believe in tales carried by villagers of the strange happenings around the once holy quiet place.

The ghoulish tale nothwithstanding none could stop the villagers far and wide to carry away rich hauls of building materials scattered all over and around the abandoned ruins. The material helped them to build their own houses. Even the more well to do could not resist the uses of those broad bricks and polished stones, often even items of beautiful sculpture, to bedeck their buildings.

The ruination must have started at the times of those wars of attrition between the Haihayas of the south, and the Pratiharas of the north. Scholars also think that the Bharasivas of Rudravasa were partially responsible for the demolition of Sarnath. Of course they had enough provocation to do so.

To their untrained and unaccustomed eyes the abominable Vajrayana degenerations (like animals sacrifices with free use of liquors, promiscuity, prayers in semi-nude or even nude state of male and female partners, interfering with dead bodies and suspected human sacrifice) had overwhelmed the holy viharas. Even the sacred precincts of the sangharamas (monasteries and nunneries) were not spared. These last, they thought were not better than clever traps set for spoilation of their youths and their homes. The anger of the untrained brute could easily start a devastating conflagration leading to total destruction.

This was precisely what must have happened to the holy vihara of Sarnath.

In this connection the contribution of the powerful Gahadavala royal benefactor, Kumaradevi's role was very important. The poor Queen, probably of Mongoloid extraction, being a princess of the Licchavi clan, was understandably swept away by Tibetan Vajrayana charms, which got not a little incentive from the degeneration of the Jainas who preferred to remain in the nude (Nagnikas and Nirgranthis).

The Sungas (c. 187-30 BC) and the Satavahanas (c. 30 BC-c. third century AD) contributed to the glories of Sarnath. In a way though Brahmanically disposed, the Gahadavalas too contributed substantially to Sarnath. Their contributions were chiefly inspired by their weakness for Tantra and Tantric rites. In fact they established a number of Tantric Vajrayana deities in Sarnath like Vaisravana, Vajravarahi, Marici, Vasundhara etc.

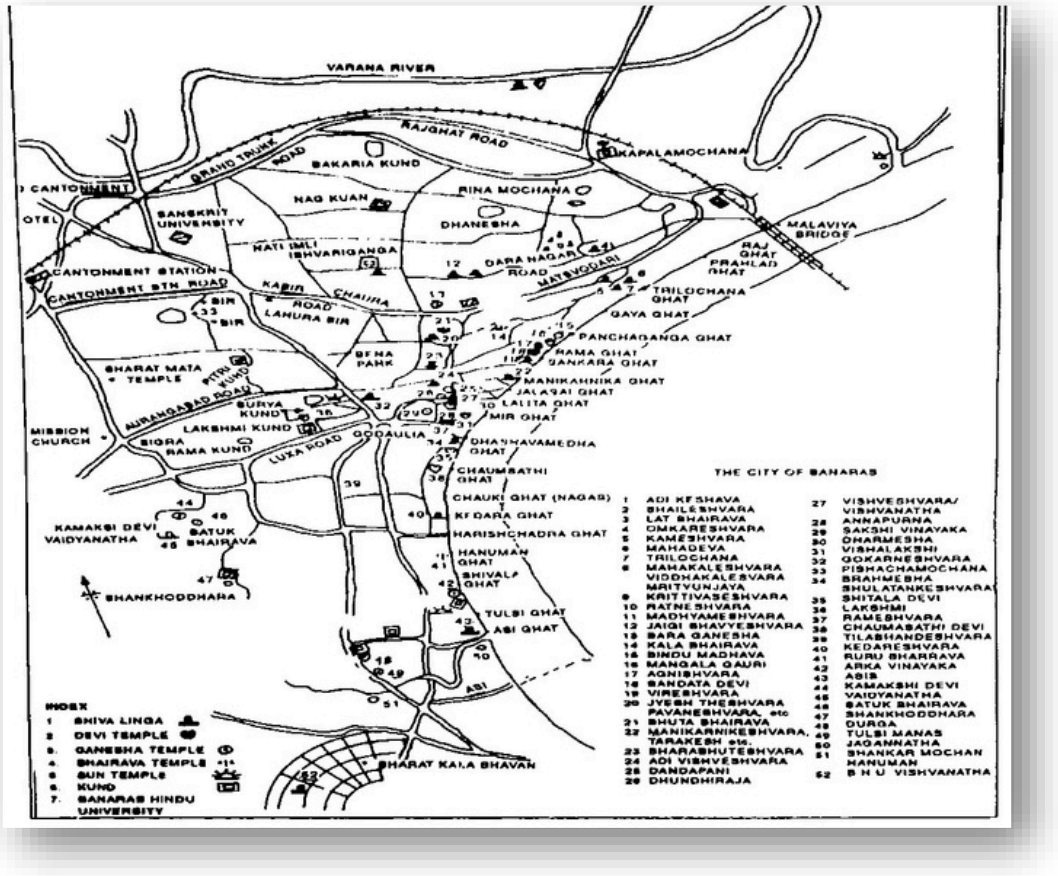
Excavations have exposed a secret subterranean pathway leading to the nunnery of Kumaradevi, which raises sinister suspicions about its uses. R.D. Banerji has boldly suggested that the pathway was a secret device to allow male participants of the séances to reach the nunnery without being detected. Naturally gossip spread, and tempers flew.

The great age of Amitabha Buddha had given way to those obnoxious rites. This irked the residents of Varanasi, who still adored the sermons of the Great Teacher Sasta.

King Govindacandra's reign came to an end by 1154. Deprived of his controlling power, things ran from bad to worse.

The rumours about the Tantra rites aroused the wrath of the Saivas. They too, in order to match the zeal of temple building

in Sarnath, engaged themselves in extensive building undertakings.



Varanasi: the city, showing temples

They built equally impressive structures along the northern banks of the Varana. From what is Mohalla Jaitpura today, to the north- western banks of the Mandakinitalao a series of very famous temples (mostly mentioned in the K. Kh. and Tirtha Vivecanakaṇḍa) came up about this time.

In fact deities consecrated within those temples were regarded as the most important ones in Varanasi. These glorify page after page of K. Kh., Kasi Mahatmya, Agni Purana and Laksmidhara's Tirtha Vivecanakanda (twelfth century). Some

of these deities are: Avi- muktesvara (then the Chief lingam of Varanasi), Omkaresvara, Adi Kesava, Kasisvara, Dantahasta-Ganesvara (Baḍa Ganesa), Mangala Gauri, Barkarikunda, Pitrkunda, Krttivasesvara, lo, even the temple of Visvanatha himself, although his glorious days had not yet arrived.

By erecting these temples the people of Varanasi in spite of their intense regard for the Buddha, and for the very grounds haloed by his sacred sermons, wanted to divert the attentions of the people, the women-folk, the rabbles of the lowest ranks, from the atrocious deeds of the Tantracaries. A showdown between the Tantra-Yaksas and Siva-Yaksas became inevitable.

One is tempted to conclude that this sudden spurt of Saivic activities in what was Anandakananam must have been provoked by the feverish tales which leaked out of Sarnath. The fascinating de- tails of the séances gradually mystified the easy minds of the gullible and the credulous. As a result Brahmanism and Bhara-Saivism had a field day. There was a funny competition, it appears, between devotees and wealthy merchants, as to who would spend more. It is on record that the Gahadavala king Jaichandra had performed a yajna on the banks near Adi-Kesava, and had built a temple in commemoration of the event.

But the people of Varanasi was always faithful to Siva and Siva's ways.

The Vajrayana Tantra, and the indulgences of the Digambara Jaina aberrations must have tried the nerves and patience of the Virasaivas (who did not anyway enjoy much patience). They in

one mad sweep destroyed the fiery pleasure garden of the Mongoloid Vajrayanis.

With that Sarnath was deprived not only of the many buildings and sculptures, but also of the great reputation which had been built over centuries. As silent witnesses to those nights of orgies we could still today see the many mutilated but artistically sculptured Devi images of Varahi, Tara, Vajra-Varahi etc. preserved in the museum of Sarnath.

Yet much remained. What the effort of the Saivas could not destroy, the armies of Mahmud, and Ghori, and lastly, that of the Sharquies of Jaunpur did. Twelfth century Sarnath was a weird bar- ren expanse haunted by wild animals, and so it remained for seven hundred years.

There was nothing much left for the later plunderers. The famous Mrgadáva was turned into a wilderness, and the world's most attractive and adored statue of Buddha was resting in a quiet sleep under tons of forgotten debris to be rescued by the scholarly efforts of an English builder turned archaeologist.

It is entirely difficult to say that the destruction of Sarnath was brought about by foreign attacks at all. The residents of Varanasi were in a great way responsible for the long stupor that had over- whelmed Sarnath.

II

Factors that had devastated Buddhist Sarnath (which indeed was situated within the janapada of Kasi upto AD 100) had helped the woodland Anandakananam develop as the present Varanasi, and completely changed the socio-religious pattern of life in the river bound hermitage. It was a change from Mahasmasana to Rudravasa, to Gauripiṭha, to

Anandakananam, to Kasi, and finally to Varanasi. This gradual mutation and cultural metamorphosis of the ancient hilly habitat has been picturesquely noted in the changes of names, which still cling to this most ancient of the ancient cities.

The continuous battles between the Kalacuris and the Pratiharas led to the complete destruction of the Kasi janapada, as well as Sarnath. Then (AD 998) the Gahadavalas took over.

Under the pressure of a rising population the original Varanasya, 'The town facing the Varana' had turned its 'face' (asya). The new township appears to have advanced southwards, along the Ganga.

So fast and determined was the extension of the city that the rulers opted for its proper protection, and decided to build a fort on the southern bank of the Varana. This newly constructed fort kept guard over the city from the Ganga-Varana confluence. This was not very far from Matsyodari, where an ancient mud-fort, con-structed by the Bhara-Sivas (local community) had still been func- tioning.

Whereas the presence of the old mud fort so near a popular river-side market emphasises the importance of the site, the decision of the new rulers, the Gahadavalas to construct a formidable fort at the confluence underlined that importance.

The township, specially the commercial centre, practically looked forward to a steady growth along the southward progress of the city. The centre of activity shifted from Sarnath and its environs in the North to the new township growing along the South around the lakes of Mandakini.

The remains of the Gahadavala-citadel could yet be figured out. Scholars think that a rich harvest of realistic evidence about

Kasi's history is still buried under the constructions of the railway-bridge- approaches, and also under the newly constructed buildings of the Rajghat Theosophical College. When in 1905 the All India Congress session was held in Varanasi, the Rajghat plateau, as the grounds were called, was found littered with tale telling shards and pottery pieces of sorts.

This deduction of scholars receives firm support from the fact that very near to the plateau still exists one of the most remarkable mosques, built almost entirely out of materials rifled from some Hindu constructions.

Such a conglomeration of constructions in and around the plateau, [(a) the mud-fort, (b) the canal connecting the Varana and the Macchodari, (c) the Rajghat fort, (d) the Mosque] points out the growing importance of this bank. Urban habitation was encroach- ing on the Anandakananam.

Creditable work since has been done by archaeologists in spite of challenging handicaps. More than 60% of what we know today of the lost Varanasi, we owe to the findings of these scholars. They have gone as deep as fourteen different layers, and the results of their finds are stored in the Bharat Kala Bhavan of Varanasi.

In this way both the ancient Sarnath and the more ancient Varanasi had been completely pushed out of modern memories; both had vanished beyond recognition, and we watch a new city grown out of the ashes of Rudravasa and Mahasmasana.

The point is that the new menace from the Muslim conquerors appear to have added only the final touches to the fatal

devastations of Sarnath. It does not seem to have been a case of murder, but a case of disposing of a sick settlement.

Such devastations had been happening all over India: Rajgir, Nalanda, Vikramasila, Ujjain; Udayana, Ballabhi, Kanci, etc. Similar centres, already humbled, had been laid to dust without much efforts from outsiders. We must not belittle and under-play the effects of keenly fought religious feuds, the Saiva-Sakta-Jaina-Buddha- Vaisnava feuds. Bodhgaya stands as a living reminder of such inter- religious rivalries.

Of the most ancient of the monuments of that ancient Kasi the Dhameka Stupa of Sarnath alone still keeps on a sad vigil.

The other sentinel standing along the road to Sarnath is a red brick octagonal structure. It is built on a mound about seventy feet high. It is a Mughal structure built at the time of Akbar by one, Govardhana, son of the famous Todarmall. It commemorates a day's stay of Humayun, Akbar's father, during his combats with Sher Shah.

When the Kusanas had taken over Kasi (1st century) Sarnath had still been a flourishing Jaina-Buddhist centre. Kaniska who be- came a Buddha follower had no reason to disturb Kasi, or Mrgadava Sarnath. That kind of devastation was encouraged by the Brahmana monarchies of Sasanka of Bengal, Sungas and Kanvas, both keen on playing champions of the Hindu cause, and hell bent to erase the memory of the non-Vedic Jaina Buddhist interlude. Echoes of such interreligious feuds and devastations could be heard in the chronicled events of the Gana-Siva and Visnu wars in Varanasi of the times of Pradyota, Divodasa, as narrated in K. Kh.

As proof for such efforts for Hindu renaissance, if proof is necessary, one may cite a strange rush for performing the Asvamedha yajna during this period. These had been performed by Kharavela, Samudragupta, Dhrtarasṭra, even the Gahadavala king, Govindacandra and Pusyamitra (Sunga), for example.

This also shows that until the times of the Kusana conquests Kasi continued to be the celebrated Hindu state it had always been.

Rudravasa, Anandakananam and Varanasi must have been regarded by the rulers of Kasi as a proud trust. Preservation of the ancient holy sanctity of the place, and the region's special status as a holy woodland, was regarded by Kasi rulers as a sacred trust of honour bequeathed by their ancestors, and the ancient law-givers of the Brahmana period.

The devastations of the Buddhist centres had almost been completed by the times of the Ghories. A periodical rape of Hindu- Buddhist centres had become a regular round-robin game for the Khaljis, Tughlaqs and Lodhis. It does not only point to the holiness of Varanasi in the Hindu psyche. Blood is not shed to destroy merely a psyche. There was something more material involved in such destruction. That was wealth, money, power. Wealth is power. To destroy power wealth has to pass hands.

That may be so. But it reveals another aspect of the case. This involves the great impact the Hindu leadership exerted on the common mind which found that wealth within temple coffers grows fast and profusely. If a temple had no wealth, none would touch it just for spiritual reasons.

However, the devastated Kasi-Varanasi was by and large the present part of the city situated between the Varana and the Asi. The area could be remarked as Omkarakhanda and Visvesvara- khanda. Their devastations did not have to touch Sarnath, or the old Kasi, except for the loot that the soldiers so much coveted for. We must bear in mind that these soldiers never received a salary. They survived on their share of the loot. Hence the fierceness of the devastations, and the finality of the ruination. Neither did they molest the wooded hilly area along the river bank, and the Western marshy woodland spreading up to modern Kalhua, Luxa, Reori- talao, Deoria Bir, and Sankaṭamocana. These areas, because of marshes and forests, remained 'out-of-bounds' for the freebooters There was nothing thereabouts to attract them.

III

After the Scythians, and under the influence of the Vajrayana form of Buddhism, temples and temple-complexes began to spring all over the place with the assistance of the Ganas and Dravidas. Whereas carved images were rarities in the land of crude lingams, rudely carved Ganesa-forms and 'Bir'-stumps,- under Kusana and Tantra influ- ence assumed popularity. Highly artistic sculptures began to appear by the first century AD. Obviously this trend, (cf. Panini, Caraka, Susruta, Varahamihira, Kalhana, Asvaghosa) was a valuable gift to Indian culture from the north-western regions of Hindukush and Gandhara, when the University of Taksasila flourished. The hard core of the Aryans in India had not yet been exposed to images, image-worship, and sculptured carvings of deities.

Temples, as we know them now, do not appear to have been a part of the Indo-Vedic culture. According to both Ananda

Coomara- swamy and Heinrich Zimmer temple architecture bloomed in India under the influence of the Mesopotamian and Iranian social forms. These had influenced the Imperialistic hold that the later Mauryan and the Gupta societies had clapped on the people. Temples, tem- ple images, temple rites, temple organisations all appear to have gained much from the West Asian traditions which were introduced only after the Macedonian penetration, and Parthian colonisation.

Ritualistic ceremonies attached to the temples became Brahmanically elaborated. Punctiliousness of temple-formalities, class exclusiveness and restrictive austerities began to take hold of the system (cf. Varahamihira). The immigrating Iranian-Babylonian Aryans gradually introduced elaborate temple-rites and forms, ex- pecting devotees not only to make impoverishing gifts of land, jew- els and harvests, but also of young girls, for entertaining the temple deities. The priests recommended, and the laity submitted. Each temple became an exceedingly tempting target for freebooters sur- viving on plunder, loot, rapine and lust.

Elaborate ritualistic ceremonies of various descriptions attained new heights and tremendous popularity in Varanasi, and its envi- rons. Whereas in Rudravasa there were no other deities, except the perpetual fire in the pit, water in the river and in the pools (kunda), (besides stray lingams, 'Nagas' and Ganadevas, or Birs), Varanasi of the Post-Gupta era enjoyed, and prided over an elaborate series of architectural creations. Indian sculpturing and bronze figures of this period form a glorious chapter of human achievement.

All the days of the calendar were marked for this or that special prayers. Each special day added to the coffers of the temple.

The Vedic yajnas faded out, yielding place to unending cycles of fasting, feasting, bathings, making gifts, and offering prayers to this or that deity, often keeping night vigils as added attractions. The economics of devotion helped to create a priest-class; and a temple-culture enshrined a powerful group with vested interests. Vedism indeed was consigned to a back seat.

The Buddha stupas and chaityas made way for elaborately constructed impressive temples, most of which contained well-paved and smoothly tiled bathing tanks with stone steps cascading down to the water. K. Mtm., K. Kh., Mahabharata, TVK, all in one voice raise á chorus of praise for the temples, for the images therein, and for the 'efficacy' of the waters of the tanks.

It would be good to bear in mind that most of the stories regarding Islamic devastations principally refer to the pilgrim centre of Varanasi, as distinct from Sarnath. Over the years the wooded re- treat had given way to a crowded and busy city. The days of the early Mughals (except Aurangzeb), and later Mughals saw both Rajputs and Mahrattas join forces in favour of retrieving the thwarted dig- nity of the Hindu faith. They jointly embellished Varanasi by con- structing the ghat, building many of the temples, and repairing the holy tanks. Of these, there efforts at reconstructing the great tem- ple of Visvesvara have to be told in detail. In effect the Kasi Nagari or the Varanasi Nagari became famous as ones the most attractive cities in India, as it still continues to be so.

Let us not forget a tragedy involved in this development. The old Anandakananam, Rudravasa, which Siva loved so much, and which had been kept out of human vandalism, was being

grabbed, chewed, destroyed by the jaws of urbanising commercial zeal where gods were made to serve the ends of men. An environmental disaster had overwhelmed the good old Anandakananam.

Human progress is a dangerous demon. As forests and lakes, hills and rivers vanished, temple were loaded with gold, silver, jewels, silk, ivory and furnishings of sorts. Choicest girls, collected mostly from high families, were brought and assembled as dedicating gifts, from all over the country. These were gifted to the gods for their divine pleasures. (The entire pre-Islam Orient from Alexandria to Persepolis was noted for such attractive gifts to the gods of their regions too.) In contrast it was a relief to the Hindu ritualistic rites that girls alone were offered as gifts, not young boys, which had been a raging trend in the oriental temples.

Whereas the ancient Anandakananam-Rudravasa-Gauripiṭha was known for its woods, tanks, rivers and orchards, the new city crowded with temples, palaces, pleasure-gardens and bazaars emerged to glorify a rejuvenated Hindu solidarity, with great faith laid in the holiness of priests and Brahmanas.

Because these last cultivated, almost exclusively, all theoretical learning and researches in art, science and philosophy, the Brah- mins became the most dominant single class known in the social setup.

No wonder such a city would draw praises from foreign travellers and scholars like Al-Biruni, Ibn Battuta, Fitch, Bernier, Tavernier, etc.

The temple brought to focus another neglected truth. The Vedic gods were gone. But the Vedic people continued to live somehow by a process of inevitable syncretisation with the indigenous popu- lation whom they had in earlier times condemned, and kept away from sacrificial grounds. (Cf. Laws of Manu, and Yajnavalkya.)

Vedic deities such as Indra, Varuna, Prajapati, Aryaman, Agni, Nasatya, Yama, Asvins, never found temples accommodation, but a number of temples were raised for the Gana-devas, Bhairavas, Devis and lingams, inclusive of their animal companions. While this was going on, the Vedic gods appeared to have decided for main- taining a safe and discreet distance from the changes.

This metamorphic devaluation in the concept of divinities inevitably reminds scholars of the Mahayana and Harappan deities which, in the Vedic days of Brahmanism, were condemned as much.

Brahmanism and classification of castes, once ousted by Buddhism, reclaimed popular recognition and homage from devotees. Chaityas gave way to temples, and Tirthankaras and Bodhisattvas gave way to Hindu avataras. In spite of all the clever claims of Brahmanical superiority only a pretended thin veneer of Aryanism separated the revived old form of the diminishing influence of Vedism.

A close study of the various Tantra treatises immediately brings to light the fact that the present Hindu rites of the Brahmanical order owe a great deal to the Tantra-Mahayana philosophy and form. The current format of the Hindu rituals is a combined product of Tantra-Mahayana-Vajrayana, and the ancient pre-

Dravidian and Dravidian tribal traditions, which had once been the original native form of 'worship'. Homa was replaced by puja.

In this connection one recalls the great contribution made by the saint Oukhariya Vaikhanasa whose Oukhariyasutra (Pre-Chris- tian era) forms a basis for ritualistic worship of post-Vedic Vaisnavism which replaced the almost defunct Vedic sacrificial rites.

V

Therefore, we are not at all surprised to find remnants of early Hindu relics hereabout. Besides the Sivalingam at Sarnath, known as Sarngesvara, we have the temple itself, and its architecture which defies the usual form and style of temples popular in these parts. We are rather reminded of the Vargabhima Temple of Tamralipti. This should be a clear indication of the temple's Vajrayogini Maha- yana form.

Popular belief maintains that this Sarnganatha lingam and the Somanatha lingam of Saurastra were contemporaries to begin with. K.Mtm. speaks of a lingam, Sanghesvara, and asserts that the same Sanghesvara is the lingam named Sarngesvara, or Sarangesvara.

The mound and the temple, even now active in the Sarnath Complex, appear to be quite ancient. The present pond in front of the temple had been a large lake, in the past, (3000 x 1000 ft) and was known as Narokara (Na-Krodha, or Akrodha) or Sarangatal. Close by there was a smaller lake, now closed up, and known as Nayatal, meaning thereby a 'later' lake. The village was known as Varahi. A neighbouring village is still called Guranpur, or Gurupur, signify- ing the influence of

Tantra gurus who lived there. Sarnath's skeletons are more living than living history.

In those carefree halcyon boyhood days (1921-23) on how many July-August Monsoon-Mondays the author used to stroll about in the wooded area, enjoying luscious ripe figs, and fresh-picked water chestnuts. How the mild Buddhist monks often entertained a Sanskrit babbling strange boy with un-monkish indulgence. Long hours of bee-laden noons passed in ransacking the subterranean webs of passages to the mysterious Kumaradevi nunneries, and galleries of habitats for monks. The peepals, the soap-nuts, the abundant neem and tamarinds kept the lake-side cool, while sudden shrill cries from peacocks warned that serpents have been sighted.

The entire world and romantic panorama, along with the mild but hard-working village lasses, and their counterparts, have been blanketed by a wealthy urbanism bent upon "presenting" an accommodative welcome to momentary sight-seers, and not so momentary scholars and monks.

By and large Sarnath as a significant centre near Varanasi had remained a deserted place ever since the Kalacuri-Haihaya feuds. These reduced it to get gradually faded out. Sarnath was wiped away from history until Mackenzie (1815) appeared on the scene.

For about 1500 years, or more, forces of destruction had been en- joying a field day. The ruins came to light only after 1815, when one Col. Mackenzie became aware of a special kind of cultural vandal- ism. He found that the area was being freely rifled for building materials, and ornamental stones by the rich and the poor alike. He decided to put a stop to the loot.

He discovered that one Jagat Singh, secretary of Raja Chet Singh of Kasi, had himself been pilfering valuable materials for his personal uses. Taking the lead, the Muslim inhabitants of Mohalla Jaitpura, Sigrole and Alaipura also began to lift materials from the famous temples at Barkarikunda and Pitrkunda, so much praised in Hindu records. These two landmarks, mentioned in K. Kh., and praised for their architectural and artistic excellence, have been completely ruined, because no Cunningham, Oertel, Mackenzie or Marshall stood against the vandalism. For our improved attitude towards the importance of preservation of antiquities we certainly owe much to the devoted Western scholars, or, are we still enough careful of our posterity and heritage?

These acts of sacrilegious destruction were not entirely being conducted by either aliens or the unbelievers. These acts of violence on ancient religious relics were being perpetrated by the Hindus themselves, or by converted Hindus. In many cases the ruins certainly recorded their native past. Cupidity respects no racial or religious boundaries.

In 1851 Major Kittoe, in building a famous Gothic structure, the historic Queen's College, Banaras (Varanasi), helped himself to the free uses of stones, statues, and other decorative artifacts collected from Sarnath. He brought over a whole Asokan pillar, and placed it on the border of the playing fields of the college. He also built a museum where he preserved the unused pieces.

(The man had at least a sense of value, if not of propriety.)

Sarnath continued to be molested.

While the lure of Sarnath continued to draw attention from the monument hunters, humble home-builders, as well as sophisticated art-thieves, simple villagers, unaware of the intrinsic value of these remains, but eager to keep the hands of the administrative powers away, carried on strange stories about gnomes, spirits, ghosts and grave-dancers buried under miles and miles of uneven deserted hard lands 'where only bricks grew'. The more one collected, the more the bricks grew infinitely.

The ruse had kept investigators away successfully over 700 years. The only witnesses that stood up amidst the colossal ruins were a stupa, a temple, one very large tank, and several other tanks grow- ing water chestnuts. The entire region from Sarnath to Markandeya was littered with mounds here, mounds there, broken walls, half- sunk places, supplying for centuries the rich, and the poor villagers building materials for their unrestricted use.

VI

Old Kasi was gone. Sarnath which stands only 16 miles from Varanasi, is now situated to the south of the present city. The old city and suburbs extended further north-east; Caukhandi, Bhitri, Kaithi, Markandeya, Sodepur, probably upto the present Gazipur.

When Hiuen Tsang came to Varanasi he had paid a visit to both Sarnath and the Visvanatha temple.* He saw several temples. This shows that the distinction of the two cities was getting into the process of being mixed up.

The markets of Varanasi at his time were found to be flooded with costly merchandise such as gold, silver, silk, ivory and

handicrafts. Al-Biruni (AD 1030) came later. But his records pay greater emphasis on Varanasi's educational and spiritual wealth.

From the confluence of the Ganga and the Varana to the confluence of the Ganga and the Gomati further north, it was all Kasi, the Kasi-Kosala 'Rajya' of the Epics. According to the Jaina and the Jataka texts the city was extended over an area of 300 leagues (900 sq. miles, almost the area of modern Delhi). This area could not have been accommodated within the present Varanasi. It would be unrealistic to expect for a city like Varanasi of those times to be as big, unless it extended upto Bhitri and Sodepur.

*Was it Visvanatha, or Krttivasesvara?The deity Visvanatha was always found in a linga form. What Hiuen Tsang describes had a human shape moulded in solid cop- per (bronze) and stood 100 ft. high. It could only be a deity in a temple situated onthe Varana, becausethe savant entered Varanasi fromthe north.

After the demise of a city, ancient and extensive, it was but natural that the adjacent Anandakananam would gradually get crowded. The refugees pushed up and down the straddling hills. The trees were cleared. The North-South lanes from Bisessarganj to Asi-Lanka or Kalabhairava, Chaukhamba, Kachaurigali, Bengaliṭola, Pitambar- pura, Sivala were extending up and up like a boa-constrictor.

The city was split into two parts One Kasi grew around the fort of Rajghat, where the ancient Gahadavala Kasirajas used to live. The old fort still stands as a mute bard singing of the old times, of the grandeur that has passed by, and the decaying ramparts guard- ing the borders of old Kasi. The name 'Rajghat' still reminds one of the proximity of the royal habitants close to the Varana, and the present railway bridge. To the far north

had grown the outer city, the city of Gazipur, winged by Bhitri, Kaithi and Sodepur.

Our old Kasi of the Puranas and of the Buddhist times could have been situated in-between. The importance and the density of her population forced even Gazipur and Sodepur to spill over across the river giving rise to still another city, Buxer. These two Islamic names attached to the old township indicate the importance of the ancient Kasi-Kosala.

Thus had Kasi and Sarnath merged with Varanasi. The old city and the monasteries had passed into a bleak memory. So had passed into memory the wooded hermitage, Anandakananam.

Memory loves ruins. Those ruins were first discovered in 1815 by Col. Mackenzie; but the sentinel which actually indicated the rich site, the Great Dhameka stupa, was raised from the munificence of Emperor Asoka (269-232 BC).

It was maintained and enriched by royal gifts from time to time. The last one of those royal gifts came from the mysterious Kumaradevi of the Licchavis, wife of Govinda Chandra of the Gahadavalas. We remember her for her nunnery, and for the secret passage lead- ing to the nunnery, and for her nocturnal devotions to the Varahi, whose image still adorns the museum of the Sarnath.

4

Mani-named Varanasi

I

It is time that the series of names pertaining to Varanasi be set at its real cultural perspective. Apart from the various poetical names of Kasi mentioned in the Jatakas some names stick to the hill chain that borders the crescent bent of the river, which holds aloft the grand spectacle of the city of Varanasi, as we know it now.

These names are, Mahasmasana, Rudravasa, Anandakananam. Gauripitham, Avimukta, Varanasi, and Kasi.

The first five names in the list are still current, thanks to the traditional community of priests of the holy city, who in ritualistic prayers continue to recite the names for the benefit of pious pilgrims. Through this technique they have preserved an important link in the cultural sequence of the history of the growth of the present city. The entire history of the cultural transformation of the city lies underlined in these names.

Mahasmasana

In times immemorial, when the hills were inhabitated by the earliest of the early pre-Aryan autochthons. Because of the nature of the half-nomadic living of the times, they came to name it (in their language) Mahasmasana, i.e., an extensive area

for cremation used by the inhabitants of the hills, and by the people of the surround- ing areas.

From the present Hariscandra ghat to the Adikesava ghat, practically the entire river-front was used (and described) as 'a cremation' ground i.e., Mahasmasana.

The present crematory 'ghat', Manikarnika, along the river, need not misdirect us. The location of a funeral ground at Manikarnika is rather a modern innovation. Because of an accidental and personal showdown between an undertaker and an important official of court of the King of Varanasi, a holy and ancient bathing site was turned into a crematory spot (of this more later).

The addition of the prefix maha (unique or great) to the com- mon word for funeral grounds, smasana only added a sublimated spiritual aura to a traditional river bank where the dead were con- signed to flames.

But in this context maha was not prefixed in a sublimating sense alone. It was used in the sense of 'oversize', indicating an extensive field (ksetra) where people cremated bodies wherever it suited them, or where spiritual quest led people to meditate and perform their rites.

The inhabitants of the valley of the Varana and the Asi used, for funeral purposes, the banks of the Ganga overshadowed by plung- ing wooded hills. Human habitations, if any, used to live atop the hilly range, and away, around ponds, lakes and rivulets. The popu- lation did not comprise of householders, for householders were prohibited from living in this area which was meant for mendicants alone. This explains (1) why urban Varanasi of the period was built on either banks of the Varana;

(2) why the greater town spread upto Bhitri and Sodepur; (3) how Sarnath kept close to Kasi; and (4) how the town was named Varanasya (facing the Varana).

There were in those days spiritual-enquirers and yogis of a certain cast of thinking who regarded funeral grounds to be the most suitable for their spiritual meditation.

They were the smasana-vasis, the dwellers of the funeral grounds. These were also known as Bhairavas (the fierce), Kharparasi (skull- bowl users), Kapardi (wearers of matted locks), Nirgranthis (out- side the Vedic laws), or Nagas (nudes), all sects of Siva-worshippers given to the most demanding, even horrifying, school of Tantra, which in itself was a distant and 'contemptible' cry from the Vedas, Vedism and Vedics.

Tantric Bhairavism appears to have been a quaint form of Pasupatism, a religious form, the traces of which have been discovered in what is known broadly as 'Harappan culture', the most popu- lar culture obtaining in the pre-Aryan society of the subcontinent (3000-1500 BC).

Besides this group of quaint Tantrics, there was another group living around the place. These were known as the Bharas, or Bhara- Sivas. They had their own shrines, totally different and quite away from the Vedic, Tantric or Puranic shrines. These were, and still are known as 'Bir' shrines. (Bhar-i-s are still found in Varanasi. They generally live by toting loads for others, particularly toting huge jars filled with Ganga-water for supply to temples, and homes. 'Bhara'- means a 'lode'. These Bhara-Sivas or Bharis filled up an important social role inasmuch as they kept homes, hermitages and temples on hills

and beyond supplied with the life-saving river water. The community was athletic, strong and, when disturbed, quite menac- ing, because of their well knit community-sense.

Bhara-Sivas as a community were thus regarded subconsciously as unchartered guards and protectors of citizens against untoward events. They are supposed to have been the original inhabitants of the hills. There is historical evidence for the fact that the Bhara-Sivas 'ruled' the Kasi- Kosala kingdom in Pre-Sunga days. They still maintain their shrines of some un-Aryan 'guard' deity, a Protector and Benefactor, Provider of a husband and children, and known as 'Bir'-s. These are worshipped on a symbolic stump (generally of wood or stone or metal-covered stone). It is more an abstract ideo-form than an im- age or deity.

Shrines of Bir, Bhairon, Lat, Ganesa or Vinayaka are scattered over the entire Varanasi area upto the very boundaries of the town- ship. These remind historians of wooded hideouts of the ancient days, when the original non-Aryan residents used to live together in rurally clustered communes.

We shall come across, again and again, with Bhara-Sivas, Bhairons and Deos, as well as with the Gana and Ganapati shrines. These are the traditional pre-Aryan places of worship of the Varanasi hill-dwellers. Historical upheavals besides, these continue to demand their due respect and homage from the people around.

It is easier for the strong to destroy trees, cut down woods, fill lakes and tanks, violate, or imbalance a natural panorama; but the humble grass, the quiet bushes and the obstinate shrubs continue to push their heads in and out of season, and proclaim the fact that the hard proletarian will to survive proves far more

effective than the destructive zeal of tyrants. Whereas great stupas and temples have been demolished and turned to dust, these humble 'Bir' shrines still draw thousands from the non-caste mass on their appointed days in the calendar to pay their due homage.

Rudrvsa

Gautama Buddha's instructions were often aimed against the Nirgranthi-s (untied by any law) and the Nagnika-s (nudes). These are generally known as the Digambara sect of Jains. Reference to the practices of these sects are found in the Itakas, and contempo- rary literature (Grhyasutras, Asvaghosa, Nagarjuna, Patan- jali, etc.), besides records left by foreign travellers (Fa-Hien, Hiuen Tsang, Ibn Battuta, Al-Biruni and even moderns, such as Ralph Fitch, Tavernier, Bernier etc.). All refer to these unclad, half-clad ash- smirched spiritual seekers laden with heaps of matted locks, or to- tally shaven.

The fact that the sects persist to this day (as we still meet them in the Kumbha Mela at Prayag) confirms the tenacity of their faith. These regarded the hills and the Mahasmasana in Varanasi as their favoured isolated hideouts. According to some, places inhabited by these 'Aghories' were often avoided by householders. This gave the place another name, the name of Rudravasa (the abode of the fierce).

The author himself in his childhood was often prevented by elders to frequent certain areas of Varanasi precisely on these grounds.

In course of time the followers of Rudra Pasupati, like the Ganas, the Kiratas, the Pisacas, the Nagas, the Raksasas, the

Siddhas, the Guhyakas, the Gandharvas and Yaksas (all belonging to non-Aryan communities) used these hills as there rendezvous (avasa). The Ganas were always a hetero-social lot. Hence Rudravasa.

Anandakananam

Puranas say (Agni P., Vayu P., K. Kh.) that the hills were specially selected to please Mother Parvati. She preferred a specially secluded woody haunt, far away from the company of the snobbish and vain society of the interfering 'Devas'. She wanted to live far away from them, and be with her Lord and Master in a spirit of free virgin abandonment, and enjoy anandam (sport, joy) under secured privacy. (The entire legend vibrates with the spirit of Tantric epistemology.)

It appears that the immigrating Aryans were fiercely harassed by anti-Aryan Siva-Pasupati followers, and the hard core Vama Tantra followers, i.e., Rudra-Sivas and Sakti followers. This ideological feud has been narrated again and again in most of the Puranas as a marriage between Siva and Sakti, the Cosmic Male and the Cosmic Female factors of Purusa and Prakyti. This union has been regarded so important an event as to deserve mention in the Epics, and in most of the later chronicles.

Does this not show for certain that the place was little exposed to the Aryan thrust at the time? And that the place enjoyed perfect seclusion?

The divine couple, the chronicles describe, actually had planned a rest, a holiday. Having enjoyed themselves, they later decided in favour of making the joy-haunt, the pleasure garden (Anandakana- nam) their permanent residence, 'never to be

moved again' (Avi- mukta), much in preference to the Kailasa in the Himalayas.

Gauripiṭham

Since Siva enjoyed the company of the Rudras, his preference for Varanasi became obvious specially when the place enjoyed the distinctive merits of seclusion, peace and above all the close touch of Ganga.

Preference of the Mother for making this her permanent home gave the choice a finality. The wooded forests thrilled the heart of the tender 'Daughter of the Mountains'. The joy-resort, Anandakananam, became a most favoured residence. It began to be honoured as Gauripiṭham, the Seat of the White Lady, Gauri. The Tantric significance of pitham, especially Gauripiṭham, particularly singled out Varanasi as a vama (left) moded 'field' of Tantric rites and exercises (sadhana). Eversince Varanasi has remained a supremely re- puted Tantra-pitha or, Tantra-centre.

Avimuktam

Thus a spiritual faith grew over the centuries that Varanasi on the Ganga, shrouded by a thick growth of woods and grottoes spread over the hills, and watered by singing rivulets and mirror-smooth lakes was a 'chosen' abode of the divine couple. The permanent seat (pitha) of the Purusa and Prakrti became a great pilgrimage for the Aghories, Rudriyas, Vama-Tantrics where they practised their form of sadhana away from the vulgar gaze of the commoners, away from the spurning comments of the highbrow Aryan Vedics.

The Purusa-Prakrti couple remains inseparably enshrined here.

There is not, and cannot be, a moment of separation between

the two cosmic forces. And the true devotees to this path consider this place as the holy of holies from where the union of the two Prime Forces never get disunited (avimukta).

Varanasi

The name Varanasi has been interpreted by many in many ways, the most popular being the reference to a city bounded by the two rivers of Varana and Asi. This, however, does not always find approval from historians, grammarians and even archaeologists.

K. Kh. often refers to the city as Varanasya. This was a clear refer- ence to the city with its face (asya) towards the river Varana. Varana + Asya joined by contiguous vowels become Varanasya, and not Varanasi, which becomes a misnomer because Varana and Asi can- not be compounded as Varanasi. And Varanasya, with a slightly phonetic degeneration could account for Varanasi.

We attach great importance to this name as it boldly proves the growth of the city along 'both' the banks of the river Varana (not Varuna, as is supposed). Thus 'facing the Varana' applies to the growth along the north as well as the south banks. The north bank, which extended upto Sarnath and beyond (upto Sodepur), having been damaged again and again by enemy attacks, the city grew along the south bank, and in course of time penetrated as far south as the Godavari Valley (modern Godhowlia Valley).

Kasi

The last name Kasi in ancient times referred to a janapada, a state apart of the vast state of Kasi-Kosala. Kasi has never been a city. Every time the Jatakas referred to this city, and this was

more than a hundred times, the city has been referred to as Varanasi. This tradi- tion has been followed in the K. Kh., K. Mtm., Kathasaritsagara, Vetala- pancavimsati, and the medieval records, until the Islamic records began to use Kasi and Varanasi indiscriminately. Anyway under post-Muslim degeneration of tongue Varanasi became Banaras, the name which even the British followed. Kasi, the state, shrunk into Kasi the city.

II

Due to the popularity of such myths, due to the unique type of spiritual practices undertaken by the usual quaint people who lived there, the area came to be called 'the-home-of-the-Rudra-people', a pre-Aryan group of people. Together with the Uma-Mahesvara cult, these two fundamentally covered all the spiritual aspirations of these people.

The Vedics had still been in the dark about the mystery-bound gorgeous hilly reservation, bordered by a river bank uninhabited, unfrequented, and used for funerals mostly.

At different points of time, the Vedics, under the leadership of various Aryan princes, attempted to dislodge the Rudriyas, Gana (Bhara) Sivas that is, from the Rudravasa, and usurp the attractive haunt. By now they had come to realise that building permanent shrines to gods like Visnu, Surya, Pracetas, Yama and Agni, and organising great yajnas like the Vajapeya, the Asvamedha, the Agnistoma, the Sautramani etc. meant more purposiveness and per- manency. The Dasasvamedha ghat is a monument to this kind of thinking.

Purana sources as well as mythical references are filled with echoes of these feuds which uninterruptedly continued upto the time of the Gahadavalas (1090).

At the end of such ancient inter-faith feuds, coexistence was achieved through a semi-political understanding which compelled the Vedics to accept the Ganas as the final authority in Varanasi for keeping peace. They, by now battle-harassed, came to realise that the only way to share the benefits of this land was to recognise the rights of the locals, and then respect them.

The benefits of coexistence, they realised, could be shared only after accepting two permanent 'guards' for enforcing strictly the agreed terms. Two such non-Aryan Yaksa-guards headed by the Lord of the Yaksas, Kuvera himself, were appointed. Kuvera came to be known as Ganesa, or Vinayaka i.e., an appointed 'Guide' in charge of local peace (Matsya P.). The entire hill site and boundaries were surrounded by shrines of the Gana-devas. As the sole guarantor of this peace the Yaksa-leader Kuvera, as Ganapati, Lord of the Hosts, took over the charge. (Satapatha Brahmana; Matsya P.)

Together with him, two more types of guards were accepted; one the Bhairavas, and other the 'Bir'-s, who had their own Lat-s, i.e., shrines of revered uncarved deities with an emblematic representation of a squat type of thick pillar-formation covered with a red paint of sindura (mercurious oxide), mostly decorated with silk and gar- lands. Both Bir-s and Ganapati-s are fully covered with sindura. (Bhairavas in contrast are kept covered with oil and soot gathered from ash collected from funeral grounds or places of sacrifice.)

The many Bhairavas, Bir-s, Ganapati-s, whose shrines still mark the boundaries and the inner citadel of Varanasi, silently bear wit- ness to the continuous feuds between two historic races engaged in a long drawn war of attrition for the final occupation of the hills by throwing out the original people of the land.

The story of ancient Varanasi, according to history and Purana chronicles mentions these feuds. These in all probability reflect the ups and downs of many battles carried for over four generations and more, of Haihayas and Paramaras,-Vitahavya-Haryasva-Divo- dasa-Alarka. The battles may not be rejected as mere fairy tales, because historical corroborations are not totally lacking.

Similar battles are also recorded between a Yaksa Harikesa and another Yaksa Pūrnabhadra. The issue was Siva to whom Harikesa was devoted. His compatriots however, resented his Saivika ways, and Saivas and Yaksas fought. The battle went on for years, until Siva's own people (Bhara-Sivas) intervened. Harikesa was elevated to the post of the Chief Guard of Kast. He was known as Dandapani, and his two associates Udbhrama and Sambhrama became perma nent guards working as 'the door-keepers' of Siva shrine every (Matsya P.). (For the most imposing images of these two, one may visit the inner gate to the shrine of Kedara in Varanasi.)

The battles of the Raksasa Ksemaka with the Haihayas (Bhadra- senya or Alarka, K. Kh.) ended up with the destruction of the Raksasa- culture with the death of Ksemaka. Saivika Kasi which had gone under Raksasa influence was redeemed by King Alarka, grandson of Divodasa. (Raksasas were a powerful race, not 'cannibals' as re- corded in derision

by Brahmanical Puranas. Yaksas and Raksasas were cousin races.)

This transformation from Yaksa-Raksa culture to Siva-culture changed Rudravasa into Anandakananam.

Let us not ignore all this as mythology (Pauranic). History substantiates what has been observed so far.

The Puranas speak of the historical events in their own idiom and poetic forms. But because these are decked in poetically embellished descriptions, popularly accepted at the time, we may not reject them altogether. Let us not ignore the grain in blowing away the chaff.

The end of the Gupta period found Varanasi entangled in religious feuds of all kinds. Jainism, Buddhism besides, the ancient Tantrics (strengthened by the later Buddhistic Hinayana-Yaksa rites of Hevajra followers), spilled themselves out in the two distinct sects of Saivas and Saktas. The latest novelties imported from the Scythians, Greeks and Persians introduced in their Tantric com- mune new forms of devotion never before known. These were the Saura and the Vaisnava rites. All of these fought for a foothold in Varanasi, the all-important Hindu centre.

The Puranic legends about the feuds are nothing but poetical narrations, fittingly described to catch the ears of the listeners.

III

Between the sixth and the thirteenth century Varanasi was being ruled by a Brahmanical dynasty, the Gahadavalas. Under their patronage Varanasi rose to became a Brahmanical stronghold. As such most of the archaeological finds of

Varanasi, most of its sculptural and architectural remains belong to this period, when the entire Hindu India became aware of the rise of Varanasi, which was hailed as the supreme centre for the cultivation of Hinduism. Scholars and students assembled in Varanasi. Puranas were being recorded, and treatises on religious rites were being elaborated by great Mimamsa scholars.

A century after the Gahadavalas, the Chinese pilgrim scholar Fahien, and another Chinese savant Hiuen Tsang describe Varanasi at its peak. Other visitors would describe the religious city in course of time. Varanasi's supremacy in the Hindu world became unrivalled (thirteenth century).

One of the most reliable sources for this period and for our observations is an inscription left by one, Pantha (Pantha, for a traveller). The inscription narrates the installation of a temple with the image of Bhavani, or Candi. His description of this deity fully con- firms his leanings towards the Vira-Sadhana of Sakti.

No better proof for the emergence in Varanasi of the ancient Tantra-form exists than this inscription. In the eighth century Tantra was fully astride in Varanasi. This is a sure sign of the influence that Vajrayana had left with the dwellers of the Mahasmasana, Gauripitha. Whoever 'Pantha' might have been, he was a devotee of Candi, Camuṇḍa, a typical Vajrayana deity fond of funeral grounds, sacrificial blood, and human carcass.

The Gahadavalas came by the eleventh century. For more than a hundred years under their governance Varanasi continued to at- tain great heights. The city was filled with temples, pilgrims,

bazars, travellers, students-scholars, and lithe attractive and accomplished girls.

We quote from the Pantha Inscription: Varanasi of the time was a compendium of the 'three worlds of dharma, artha and kama'. In other words the inscription confirms that Varanasi was not only religiously great, but as a business place and commercial centre as well. As a place for 'having a good time' the city was equally equipped, and without a compeer. "Believers came here to live and die; Siva never abandoned the favourite place... the streets were wide and crowded.... High temple spires and beautiful women equally added to the attractions of the city. The tirtha of Varanasi was so effective that it could remove all sins, inclusive of the sin of all sins, killing of a Brahmin."

Buddhism and Jainism had vanished from the scene, but Tantra remained, as it remains even now.

We learn not only of Varanasi, but of the entire Hindu world from an encyclopaedic treatise of Laksmidhara, the chief Pandit of the court of the Gahadavala King Gobindacandra. His book Krtya Kalpataru contains hundreds of papers (nibandhas) on all possible Hindu rites, and has been written in fourteen volumes. But another of his important books for our source is Tirtha Vivecanakanda (1150), and it mentions as many as 550 established Hindu shrines in Varanasi.

IV

Most of the shrines are no longer traceable thanks to Islamic devastations followed by the British zeal for 'laying out a city. But from those shrines which are still traceable, we could safely infer that these were fairly distributed all along the boundaries of the ancient settlement. The fact that some of these (Like the

one at Deoria-Bir and another at Khojowah) are still found right in the centre of today's city, need not make us forget that what we call 'the centre of the city' today was two thousand years back but a suburban wilderness. Bhoju-Bir, Lauria-Bir are popular localities.

This, again, is an added evidence to show that the main city of Varanasi did not extend beyond Omkarakhanda. The extension of the city from Omkarakhanda to Visvanathakhanda appears to have

been a gradual process.

Along the boundary line of the Omkarakhanda one could still discover a series of Gana shrines, which are still 'alive', and regu- larly worshipped.

These are, Srsti Vinayaka, Saksi Vinayaka, Kona Vinayaka,

Dehali Vinayaka, Cintamani Vinayaka, Gopreksa Vinayaka, Hasti Vinayaka, Sindura Vinayaka, Dhundi Vinayaka, Arghya

Vinayaka, Danḍesvara Vinayaka, Durga Bhimacanḍa Vinayaka, Uddanḍa Vina- yaka, Pasapani Vinayaka, Kharva Vinayaka, and Siddhi Vinayaka.

If we take up a journey starting from the Asi-end of the present

town to the Varana-end, drawing a complete circle, or an arc, around the boundaries of Pancakrosi, which more or less describes the ex- treme reaches of the old township, or the wooded area of Ananda- kananam, we could observe how the boundaries were strictly taken care of. Near the Asi we have Arka Vinayaka; then travelling due west in a circle, and meeting the Varana in the north we come across these Vinayakas one after the other, well placed all around. (1) Arka Vinayaka, (2) Durga Vinayaka, (3) Bhimacanda Vinayaka, (4)

Dehali Vinayaka, (5) Uddanḍa Vinayaka, (6) Pasapani Vinayaka, (7) Kharva Vinayaka, and (8) Siddhi Vinayaka-eight in all. They cover up the eight cardinal points of the city pretty well, reminding us of the eight directions.

Apart from this, there was an inner circle guarding the inner sanctuary of the Antargrha, or Visvanathakhanda. This inner circle was guarded by Dhundi Vinayaka, Saksi Vinayaka, Maharaja (Danta- hasta) Vinayaka (Baḍa Ganesa), and Moda Vinayaka.

Similarly the Gana-devas too have found their sanctuaries in the town to remind us of the Yaksa ancestry of the holy town. We could name a few of them here. Sulapani, Mudgarapani, Vinayaka, Kusmanḍa, Gajatunda, Jayanta, Madotkata, etc.

(Originally the names of the Gana-devas must have been known in a Gana-dialect, for the Ganas did not have any recourse to Sanskrit. In all probability the names were later on Sanskritised and preserved as we find them now. But this need not bother us.)

Along with these Gana-devas we must recall the presence of the Bhairavas of Kasi. These are sixty-four in all, with their alter egos the Yogini-s number 64. The most important of the Bhiravas, how- ever, are eight: Kapali, Asitanga, Ruru, Canda, Krodhana, Unmatta, Bhisana, and Samhara.

While the worship of Yakasas and Nagas indicates the presence of pre-Aryan culture in Varanasi, another culture had entered the Indian subcontinent. The worship of the Sun as a deity was perhaps of Egypto-Iranian origin. The worship of Apollo, Mihira or Gavasti has not been accepted as Vedic, at least not in its temple-bound rites. (The Vedics do not appear to have

known any temple culture.) This refusal was due to the fact that eroticism, public prostitution and promiscuity had been inseparable rites in the Sun temples.

But we find these rites finally made a stay in India specially after India's exposure to the Greek culture as permeated through the Kusanas.

We find a series of the Sun temples established in Varanasi which naturally reminds us of the non-Aryan domination still erusting within the Varanasi culture.

We could locate as many as twelve sun-shrines in Varanasi. The localised grass-root residents of the social structure of Varanasi take great pride in paying cyclic visits to these shrines. Some of them, like Lolarka, Sambaditya and Mayukhaditya still draw a very large crowd, specially in the months of Margasirsa and Magha.

We mention here twelve shrines with their possible locations.

Lolarka at Bhadaini near Asi

Uttararka at Bakariakuṇḍa

Sambaditya at Suryakuṇḍa

Draupadaditya at West of present Visvanatha

Mayukhaditya at Mangala Gauri

Khakholkaditya at Kamesvara

Arunaditya at Trilocana

Brddhaditya at Mir ghat

Kesavaditya at Adikesava

Gandhaditya at Lalita ghat

Yamaditya at Biresvara temple Vimaladitya at Godhowlia (on the Godavari) By now we have been convinced that the dominant feature of
Varanasi culture has always been a non-Vedic Siva-culture, as a coun- ter and challenge to the exclusive, touchy, orthodox Vedism. Varanasi has never been, and will never be, puritanically Vedic. Varanasi continues to remain Hindu in spirit and form, i.e., a holy place with primordial pre-Aryan traditions where a synthetic form of toned Vedic principles coexist with a variety of native practices.

In other words, after the battles between the Rudriyas and the pure Vedics had ran on and on for centuries, the reforment move for the subjugation of the pure Vedic culture, and moulding it into the present Hindu culture, received a great support from Varanasi.

Thus Varanasi is deservedly considered as a great seat for the Hindu faith. In fact here was the great Hindu faith experimented, thrashed, pounded into a crucible, scrutinised, moulded and re- formed. The spiritual mould of Varanasi, still liberal, still catholic, still gay and happy, is considered by the diehard as antiscriptural, and by the true spiritualists, as a haven for liberation. Kasi's role as a seat for spiritual realisation of perfect liberation from ties of form and rites still plays a dominant role in moulding the format of Hinduism.

V

The development of Tantra in Varanasi has influenced its content and life-style to a very great extent, the effects of which are not easily recognised, or honoured. The very name Avimukta itself conceals a Tantric nuance which might be

analysed to reach at the bottom of the mystique that Varanasi projects.

It has already been explained how the names Anandakananam and Gauripiṭham carry underlying mystic tones, not easily perceived by the novice, the uninitiated. The names are, however, significant.

The hills of Varanasi and adjoining valleys have been divided for classical references in three sections or khandams. These are, as we had to refer to previously already,-Kedarakhanḍa, Visvanatha- khanda and Omkarakhanda. Each of these denotes a hilly elevation along with the attached valleys.

In the remote past the three khandas together were referred to generally as Rudravasa. In those days it was covered by woody growths and lakes. This, we have noted, gave it the appropriate descriptive name of kanana, or garden.

What gave it the ananda (joy) has already been noted. But here we have to stop, consider, probe and discover Tantric implications into which we had not gone deeper. In this context the third appellation 'Avimuktam' assumes a mystic and esoteric significance. It deserves a more careful and detailed exposition.

The geographical extension and political power-grit of Kasi-Kosala has been marked out in the Puranas and history. Roughly it includes the area bounded by the two large rivers, the Gandaki and the Gomati, its southern side of course, being marked by the great Ganga.

According to the Jatakas the janapada (district) was as big as 300 yojanas (2400 sq. miles). Kosala to the north Magadha to the east, and Vaisali to the west, it was spread well over 250

miles (north- west) according to Altekar. His History of Banaras claims that the Kasi janapada was spread from modern Kanpur to Balia. This area should include modern Mirzapur, Tanda, Chunar, Vindhyachal, Bhadohi, Gazipur and Sodepur.

Banganga, an offshoot of Ganga, flows off the stream to merge again back in the Ganga at Sodepur. Although that stream does not flow today, yet it has left unmistakable marks of a dried up river- bed. This course and the river-bed has been referred to in Puranas, as Mrtak Ganga, or, 'Dead Ganga'. We have to think of Kasi as a janapada keeping in mind this 'Dead Ganga'. The common concept of Varanasi does not bring into focus the existence of this im- portant flow, the Mrtak Ganga.

But Varanasi has always been referred to in the Puranas as a town- ship.

The clear indication of an ancient mud embankment along the course of the Varana is still visible in Varanasi. This was constructed to safeguard the city from the Ganga floods during the monsoons. Even today when the monsoons and the flood in the Varana try to break through, and flood the city, this embankment protects around Jaitpura, Nate Imli, Adampura, Jagatgunj and Chowka ghat. ('Ghat' clearly denotes a 'halting place' along a river flow.)

VI

Buddha's Isipattanam covers this area inclusive of northern Ananda- kananam. In any case there was a subtle difference between Varanasi and Isipattanam. The latter name indicates a settlement of or the rsis, or 'holy' men.

Sarnath of the Buddhist fame was in the neighbourhood of

Isipattanam, which was a wooded hermitage, and in the woods lived many animals in fearless freedom, which gave it another descriptive appellation, Mrgadava (where animals move).

Sarnath certainly was not a dreamy barren valley as it looks now, and the neighbourhood of Sarnath from Mrgadava to the Varana bank used to be well populated.

The population shifted only under the constant threat of attacks, until the times of the Gahadavalas when the wisdom of the rulers decided for shifting the township, and constructing a fort, a bridge, and develop several places. Chowka ghat was one of them.

What we know as Sarnath today must have been the northern end of Isipattanam. In Buddha's days the present 'Bazar'-locality was not what it is today. At one time the Buddha himself had given a try to the rigorous way of the Bhairavas, though later he had abandoned it. He had been cured of the morbid idealism of seeking absolute seclusion for self-sublimation. He needed the populace, as the populace needed him.

He later on preached to his Pancabaggiya disciples in

Mṛgadava about what made him give up the austere way. Mrgadava was of course the wooded environs around the present Sarnath which included, partly, the area now covered up by the Cunningham excavations. For seven to eight hundred years the viharas around the great stupa were receiving liberal grants from different houses of royalties both of the north and south of the land. It is impossible to believe that the great vihara area was not harbouring also common human habitations extending upto the northern banks of the Varana.

The hermitage of Sarnath was indeed situated close to Mrgadava. But Isipattana? This locality must have been nearer the Varana, and spilled over both the banks. It appears that from the northern banks to the actual Mrgadava-Sarnath, the lands adjacent to the river, upto the borders of the stupa-area, were overgrown with well-laid lush orchards and trees of sorts, and the great sresthis (businessmen) built their rest-houses and pleasure gardens around this very area. The tradition of building extensive pleasure gardens and rest-houses around this area still persists.

In any case this area which looks so elemental and dreary today could have been the extensions of a popular city inhabited by an urban commercial community which flourished mostly on river trade, the Varana being their important 'highway'. Some kind of catastrophe, a persisting menace like lawlessness or battle hazards forced the people to jump over to the southern bank, were royal protection was available.

Varanasi was always referred to as a township. It also shows that while Mrgadava offered a garden resort, Isipattana was exclusively constituted of hermitages. The subtle distinction of the two could have been confused, specially after Sarnath had been destroyed [first by (a) Brahmanical wrath, before being completely razed to the grounds by (b) Islamic attacks (1018)]. What Islam could not do, the local looters succeeded in doing over a long stretch of time.

The township of Varanasi, also known as Varanasya (Varana + Asya-face: i.e., a town facing the Varana) referred to a popular trade centre that faced the river from both the banks.

To have explained the word Varanasi with the conventional help of the words Varana and Asi must have been due to a simplistic coinage of poetical license. Poetic may be; yet this last interpretation has stuck to imagination, as poetry does. We mention in this context some of the other poetic names which from time to time have been pasted on Varanasi. Sudarsana, Surandhana, Brahmavardhana, Puspavati, Rama or Ramya and Malini or Mukulini. The name of the janapada was Kasipur of which the capital was Potli. (The name occurs in the different Jatakas.)

Although the Puranas (always post-Buddhist) use Varanasi and Kasi interchangeably, in fact Varanasi has always been the capital of the Kasi janapada. When the Gahadavala rajas (king) decided to build a fort across the Varana, and safeguard the city from the disturbing incessant attacks of neighbouring powers, they chose the confluence of the two rivers for building a strong fort, which was, incidentally, also an important entrance to the city, and to its principal market. The river Varana was freely used as a water highway leading to the modern Bisessargunj market, then situated on the banks of both Macchodari and Mandakinitalao. The fort built on a plateau was very strong as is proved by the fact that it was used later by English forces also.

The well populated neighbourhood was celebrated for several important temples. Most of these have been destroyed, but some still exist, reminding us of better times. These include (1) the temples of the guardian angels of the city Varanasya Devi and (2) Kasi Devi, (3) Kharva Vinayaka, (4) Rajaraja Vinayaka, (5) the great Lingam, Adi Mahadeva, and (6) Adi Kesava. Although there is no Bhairava guardian nearby, it may

be mentioned that a smasana still operates here, and the 'prince' of all Bhairava followers, Dattatreya himself has been honoured by a special shrine.

The name Rajghat still sticks to the area although the city itself has shifted far to the south. In spite of the rapid urban expansion of the time, it must be observed, that the sylvan north, inhabited by spiritual seekers, had been left so far thankfully alone. But eventu- ally the jaws of Father Time would swallow that too.

VII

There was another reason why the Gahadavalas chose this place for their fort. Nearby on a bend of the river Varana there existed, near Macchodari, a mud fort built by the Bhara Sivas in the hoary past. Ganas of Kasi always felt keen about protecting their rights, which were being violated uninterruptedly by the city dwellers and temple builders. The Bhara-s felt how they were disregarded even ignored as 'inferiors'. This they always resented, and they kept up a stout front and fought for their rights. The Bhara-s could not be ignored. It always proved dangerous to do so.

The temple-builders on the other hand, were set at the of game civilising' a rude people; and in the process they had been at their old ploy of 'spreading culture' (Kurvantu visvam Aryam). This game was being played assiduously around Varanasi. But they failed ultimately to oust the Bhara-Sivas, and decided to settle for a compromise.

The common mass of Varanasi, the proletariat, we have already noted, still betray the ancient traits of the Bhara-Sivas. They still bear that ready and rough demeanour of the ancient Rudriyas, which very largely dominated the tempers of the

ancient dwellers of this forest land. The 'Rudras' of old still abide within the arteries of the so-called 'roughs' of Varanasi, as the behaviour pattern of the Pandavas, the Gangaputras, the Abhiras would demonstrate even now. This kind of behaviour has set a pattern amongst other local clans too: the Bhanḍas, the Murmi-s, the Kewat-s, the Kumhars, the Ahir-s and the Dom-s of Varanasi. These communities cannot be ignored in Varanasi even today without causing a serious threat to civic peace.

No, the Siva-Pasupati-Bhairava people still dominate the Varanasi milieu as of old, and Brahmanism of Varanasi has outlived the vaunted Vedic pride through the irresistible process of syncretism.

VIII

There are still other evidences illustrating this embattled state of affairs. The Brahmanical moves for suppression of the locals and their ways affected the very character of the people of Varanasi. Today, the same traits colour even Brahmanism itself, as it obtained there.

The case of a local Prince Dhṛtarastra, and his attempts to perform Vedic yajnas illustrates the point. Because of the Vedic refusal of accepting the locals as equals, the Bhara-Sivas, as the locals were called, developed an anti-Vedic complex, despite the much publicised domination of the Brahmins. That most of the residents, even the Brahmanically minded ones, fell an easy prey to the enticements of Saivika conversion is yet another pointer. No man admires to own-hate and scorn as a heritage.

We shall see later that Prince Dhṛtarastra's yajna was disturbed. He was not permitted to partake to the soma drink. He was com-

pelled to be reminded of his Non-Aryan descent, and forced to stay within the fold.

Rudravasa, as we have seen, was known for its Bhara-Siva ways, which is as good as saying Bhairava-Yaksa ways, the anti-Veda ways of Harikesa and Ksemaka. We get from the Mahamayuri Journal that the overlord of Rudravasa during the second century was Mahakala (a Tantric deity), who was a Yaksa (15.27.12). We have seen how Harikesa, Udbhrama, Vibhrama, even Kuvera, the Yaksa King, him- self had reserved for themselves the important post of the chief of these Ganas. Kuvera attained the post of Ganesa after his conversion to the Siva-devotions. He was appointed, as it were, as the all important Warden of the Marches.

Instances could be found when the Bhara-Sivas performed rites re- served for Aryans alone.

The Rajghat excavations support the early hold of Bhara-Sivas over Vedism. These Bhara-Sivas, according to a Vakaṭaka inscrip- tion, had organized Asvamedha sacrifices. (Puranas say Brahma performed them. Did the Brahmana writers thereby want to elimi- nate a non-Aryan effort?)

Sivalingodvahana Rajavamsanam... Dasasvamedha-snananam

Bharasivanam....!

This incident confers a very significant meaning to the famed Dasasvamedha ghat. It also explains somewhat the reference in the Linga P. and K. Kh. of Brahma's performance of ten Asvamedha. In the Bharata Kala Bhavana of Varanasi there exists a badly damaged bust carrying a lingam on its head, as the Bhara-Sivas were accustomed doing.

The word 'Avabhrata' mentioned in the inscription is a ceremonial bath by immersion which seals with consecration the comple- tion of an avowed sacrificial undertaking.

We also know of Rudrasarovara near to this ghat, and also of a Brahmavasa. This last was really a 'hostel' for young Brahmin learn- ers to stay and receive Vedic instructions. Both the hostel and the sarovara have long been buried under the constructions of a Rama temple, and a market, and no Islamic hand did it.

We have mentioned a mud fort built by the threatened Rudra-Sivas, or Bhara-Sivas on the Macchodari channel-bend. This channel-bend is important for our research. At a later stage we propose to discuss the implications of the channel and the mud-fort.

We have also noted the protestations of the local residents against acceptance of Vedic yajnas because of the refusals of the Brahmanical superiors to share the divine soma with them. That restriction against inter-drinking, inter-dining, inter-marriages still protects the sanctimonious reserves of the Brahmin.

The opposition of the Bhara-s to Brahmanical posturing and high handedness has never been let up. Varanasi-culture suffered constant turmoil, and accepted both Saivism and Ganesa as a decent method of coexistence.

The tension was too much for the original residents, who for all times to come continued to nurse and cultivate a rough and ready rowdy attitude towards the protagonists of refinement and exclusiveness. Pure Aryanism never agreed with their grain.

The jumble-tumble of the Jaina-Buddha era against restrictive lines of the imposed caste system did not improve the situation. A lot of noise was raised against the Brahmanical system, and the mass became severely protective towards their age-sanctioned Rudra mode of living. They felt that the idea of Varnasrama was an anathema, It could well be that the evil reputation of Varanasi for rowdism, chicanery and false pretences leading to plunder, bluster bully, even murder, or for Varanasi's tradition of raising the upper fist too readily against ostentatious 'do-gooders' is traceable to these historical impositions on native culture.

The original residents of the wood had age by age been pushed down the hills. They struggled to scrape out their miserable living in marshes, jungles, and god-forsaken doomlands, like the north- western and western wilderness around the expanding bounds of the city-contained between the Varana and the Godavari channel.

IX

Along the Ganga at Varanasi, one meets with some unexpected ranges of some rocky shingly encarpments. Apparently these are straggling riotous extensions of the Vindhya range.

We are aware of the fact that the mountain ranges and their encarpmental offshoots are always dear to the tribals. They express their grateful thanks to the unseen gods by reserving special places of prayers on elevated hill tops. Most of these vantage points are dedicated to a Mother, Vindhyavasini being their Mother-Superior. Similar encarpments found in Gaya and Hazaribagh districts are found crowned with some kind or other

religious monument. Of course Siva and the Mother have been the Supreme godhead in Varanasi, and Tantra its real guide.

The steady west-east current of the Ganga is deflected from its course because of these sprouting hill formations built mostly of shingles based on sandstone piles. Obstructed by this range the east- flowing Ganga suddenly takes a northward turn and resumes its eastern course after meeting the Gomati at Sodepur, beyond Markandeya and Kaithi.

On this range we have been searching for the implications of the names by which Varanasi has been described e.g., Mahasmasana, Gauripiṭha, Rudravasa, Anandakananam and Avimukta. Do the names not reflect a gradual acceptance on the part of the Aryans to absorb, assimilate and extol the. Non-Vedic concept of a primordial Father-Mother play-mate combine? Was it not conceived as a Male- Female club out of which creation emerged? This concept is to simplistic, too real and pragmatic to be Vedic?

Since the current names are found recorded in Sanskrit, we might as well infer the names to be post-Aryan. We know that conquerors are fond of hoisting new names to what they occupy as their own.

Though Gang (in Mundari) they could not change, they named the river the Ganga, and gave the river a string of descriptive names. Old names carry ugly memories of forced occupation. In our times the names of places and towns in the USA, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand could be cited as examples. Alexander had changed the names of many cities so that Greek towns could be remembered, and a nostalgia would keep the colony of the Greeks within disciplined bounds. The Turks,

Afghans and Mughals too changed names of many Indian cities. Mahasmasana and Rudravasa seem to have been so named under similar compulsions.

In course of time the newcomers assimilated the Rudra-way of thinking and living, and gradually tamed both the streams of culture into a single dominant current, named Sindhuism, or Hindu- ism. It described the basic philosophy of the life of the people who lived across the Sindhu, i.e., the Indus river.

The Pasupata, Uma-Mahesvara and Kapalika antecedents of Varanasi need not call for further evidence. A close study of the extant shrines related to these cults, and which are still found scattered all over the Mahasmasana Anadakanana Varanasi, drives home the fact that originally this place did belong to a people who lived contrary to the Vedic ways.

Besides such non-Vedic shrines as Nikumbhesvara and Gokarne- svara, we have Ksemakesvara, Danta-vaktra and the sixteen sundry Gana-devas, also known as 'Deo'-s. Bara-Deo still abides under a tree in Godhowlia, where the Godavari river used to flow, and there- abouts was situated the holy tanks of Agastya. Of course Siva himself was called endearingly as Maha-Deo, that is, the Deo of all Deo-s, Deva-Deva.

Besides the Vinayakas located along the boundaries of the Varana there are important Deo-s or Gana-s like Nandikesvara, Kutagana etc. Puspadanta sits astride the slopes reaching Ganesamohalla (the abode of Ganesa).

Through the legends, semi-historical legends, relating to personalities like Harikesa and Divodasa etc. we became aware of a time when Visnu (Vedism) chased away the Rudras and the Yaksas (Mani- karnika-legends). But by fifth century BC

Gana-Sivas were firmly established. (Hiranyakesi Grhyasutra and the Pippalada branch of Atharvaveda.)

We have already noted how the course of this mutual agreement for coexistence affected Varanasi-life. The shrines of the many Bhairavas, Ganas, Vinayakas, and of course the Bir-s cannot be ignored. All these shrines offer monumental evidences to Varanasi's Rudra-Siva antiquity.

At this stage we propose to go deeper into the Tantric phase of the Varanasi culture.

X

Traditionally the two streams, Varana and Asi, have been subjected to many mystic and poetic explanations. These appear to be clever, and at times emotional compositions of post-Vedic devotees. The hills, the wooded cover, the streams certainly belong to times older than the Aryan immigrations.

Today the visitors to Varanasi, as also scholars, have forgotten that besides these two publicised streams several other streams washed the Varanasi hills. Some of these like the Mandakini, the Godavari, the Dhutapapa have been important streams, often spanned by bridges. These streams were found active as early as 1090 in 1290. They are found mentioned in 1290, and later in the times of Akbar and Aurangzeb. There is every reason to believe that these streams were encountered by Warren Hastings himself.

It has to be noted that it was only 'after' the British occupation, and the consequent rape of Varanasi, that these streams had been sealed in the name of beautification and hygiene! The bridges (pul, setu), long since demolished, are now remembered only through the names they have left behind.

Agasti-pul, Dersi (Deori-Siva) ka Pul, Pul-ki-Kali, etc., are soft reminders of those other times.

The Pathans and the Mughals had been admirers and protectors of trees, streams and lakes, because they, coming from parched arid lands, maintained a traditional regard for waterways and orchards. Indeed they destroyed and looted famous shrines, but they did so primarily for the wealth in gold, silver and jewellery. They desecrated the deities to satisfy their religious injunctions, but they hated to disturb the topography of a beautifully located panorama, which they appreciated. To the Islamic taste we owe some of the most renowned gardens of India.

In contrast, the mercantile community from England did not waste any such aesthetic feelings for preservation of natural beau- ties in quarters already 'infested' by a mass of black natives.

5

A BoatRide

I

We had set out to rediscover Varanasi. That task could be started now. For that we propose to undertake an imaginary boat-ride about the year 1070 along the Varana river from the Adikesava point up- stream to about ten miles past Sailesvara, past the Azamgarh Road- junction, past the back of the Cantonment Settlement and Ardali bazar, and watch the pulsating life-drama animating both the banks.

We propose to enjoy this trip fully. For that we have to disengage our mind from the seductive beauty of the present city built on hills half-girding it. We have to forget that captivating crescent range which forces the stream to take a northerly course.

As we disengage our minds from that fascinating charm we could be sure of turning our eyes to the real city, which has been well sung from age to age by the pious, the ascetic, the saintly, the scholarly and the poets. Age was never tired to fondle this beloved city by singing its praise in many names. In Jaina, Buddha, Purana texts emotive and poetic names appear

in close succession, Surandhana, Sudarsana, Puspavati, even Ramya (the Beautiful one).

Compared to these sonorous names, the southern reaches of Varanasi were known by a rather placid non-Aryan name, Sanku- karna, a Pisaca, or Yaksa appellation. (Any one acquainted with the plays of Bhavabhūti or Bhattanarayana would know how authors coin names for the dramatic persons of non-Aryan origin. These sound as funny. Why? The great Valmiki himself used such names as Surpanakha and Kumbhakarna to denote persons of non-Aryan descent.)

Kasyapa Buddha was born in Varanasi, says Buddhaghosa.

And he died at Mṛgadava. This testimony clearly shows that Varanasi and Mṛgadava were considered towns apart. According to him the main shrines and pilgrimages in Varanasi were but few: Manikarnika,

Jnanavapi, Pancaganga, Barkarikuṇḍa, Bindumadhava, and Visva- natha. Varanasi of the time of BuddhaghoSa had not any more mentionable shrines.

Let us note here that the shrines so mentioned related to only the two khandas, Omkara and Visvesvara. Kedarakhanda does not appear in the picture.

This again points out to two facts: (1) The Main-Varanasi township grew along the strip falling between the Mandakini and, Macchodari, and the main chowk hill from where flows the Godavari. (2) It suggests that the city lying to the south of Dasasvamedha and Agastyakunda had remained a more or less undeveloped area. From these two points it could be inferred that the city river-front from Pancaganga to Asi was studiously left alone as a stretch of wooded hills. The actual city of

Varanasi, therefore, flourished within the highly populated Omkarakhanda, or the area along the banks of the Varana, and partly along the Ganga as far as Trilocana- Pancaganga.

The alluring beauty of modern Varanasi riverside should not be allowed to distract our minds from the beauties of the city of the days of well-known rulers like Dhanvantari, Haryasva, Vitahavya, Pratardana and Divodasa. We must not forget that compared to the history of Anandakananam and Rudravasa, the construction of the fort at Rajghat, and occupation of the Rajghat-plateau are incidents of much later history.

We are undertaking our boat-ride along this city spread on both the sides of the Varana. Some say that the old city actually spread from the confluence of the Gomati to the confluence of the Varana, and further south to the banks of the Mandakinitalao. The actual Visvesvara hill was further up, as a culminating point.

It was this city, which as a part of Kosala was settled by King Kasa of the Pururavas dynasty. Dhanvantari was the grandson of Kasa, and Divodasa was the grandson of Dhanvantari. It was Divodasa's idea to drive out the 'rude' Siva (Bhara) elements of Varanasi, or of Rudravasa, which the Haihayas resisted through the Princes Vitahavya and Haryasva.

A 1027 copperplate states how Buddhism, then almost uprooted by the Hindu upsurge, was reinstated under Nabipal, but by the late eleventh century a Kanauj King, Candradeva (1072-96) established Saivism again, and completely erased the sprouting Neo-Buddhistic elements.

We see herein the drama of religious feuds prior to the Islamic onslaughts. We could not appreciate whose were the hands that

had destroyed the old city of Varanasi, of which the Buddha spoke, and which stood in the neighbourhood of the great centre at Sarnath.

The entire city, from Mrgadava to the Varana bank, had thus been already razed to the grounds. This happened much before the Islamic raids on the new city, and much before the emergence of its rich string of temples.

Further evidence of these changes could be read into the architectural characteristics of the temples which were then built around the famed Barkarikunda, which, in course of time, were devastated by the Islamic hordes. Those remnants and pieces of Buddhist and Saiva architecture today adorn the two mosques built near Barkarikunda.

This should be sufficient to prove that the old Varanasi (specially Omkarakhanda), Rudravasa, and Anandakananam as abodes of saints, were left studiously alone from these political changes.

The destruction of the new settlement along the Varana, namely Omkarakhanda, and of the other vital Visvesvarakhanda, which contained Manikarnika, Jnanavapi, Dhuṇḍi, Visvesvara, Visa- laksi and Bhavani, is a story of another age, another turn of history that starts with the Afghan raids for wealth, property, and by the way, also for upholding the cause of zealous religious fanaticism.

From the Varana to the Gomati (Gazipur) along the Ganga there existed a number of settlements, like chained townships, as evidenced by the Buddhist records and by the finds in archaeological research. Fallouts from these ancient townships are still traceable to discerning eyes, though the names of

Buddha-Hindu origin gave way to latterly imposed Arabic names.

Around the once powerful janapada of Kasi-Kosala we meet instead of such poetized names as Kausambi, Kusumavati, Sravasti, Prayag, Devika, Malini, highly Arabic names of today, as Faizabad, Azamgarh, Shahabad, Allahabad, Jaunpur, and Ghazipur.

It is important for our study to remember that it was through this area that travellers like Fa-Hien and Hiüen Tsang had approached Varanasi. Almost all of them came by the northern route through Jetavana and Sravasti. The question of coming to Varanasi by fording the Ganga from her eastern bank did not arise. When Hiüen Tsang was viewing the golden minarets of the Visvesvara temple, about which he became so poetically ecstatic he must have been standing on the southern bank of the Varana (not on the eastern bank of the Ganga), where people had organised a great reception for the savant.

Naturally this indicates that the Varana-approach led to the hub of the city where a great reception was organised for the savant. The changed names of all the townships should not be allowed to misguide us. Attempts were made to change the name of Varanasi too into Alipur. Archaeologists have successfully recovered the old names, and proved the facts that the area had been, as it still is, a densely populated chain of townships. Dialects, languages, crafts, songs, fairs and traditional norms of the existing villages and towns direct towards one salient point, 'Varanasi', the great city, flourished quite away from where it is now. The Ganga was the holy river supreme, but Varanasi formed the main commercial and large boats laden with

merchandise gained access to the main market through the Varana and the Macchodari channel.

Since the janapadas were rich and well populated, the rival royal principalities always felt too greedy to occupy Kasi. This brought pressure on the populace, who for safety crossed over to the other bank, and decided to settle there, and developed the area into a big trade centre in course of time. It still continues to be so.

This was not a little facilitated by another fact referred to above.

The overflows from the large lakes on the southern bank had collected into a stream which emptied its waters in the Varana. This stream was considerably deep for country-boats to ply, and carry commercial produce to the main market. It is even now known as Visvesvaragunj, the 'Market of Visvesvara'.

[Incidentally, it was on the 'bend' of this strategic channel that the autochthonic people of Varanasi known as Bir-s or Vira-Saivas (Ganas) had constructed a mud fort.

Taking a cue from this fort the Gahadavalas decided to build the Rajghat fort at this confluence.]

The area between the two modern markets of Gola-Dinanath and Bisessargunj was then, as it continues to be even now, the hub of Varanasi's commercial life, and its northern section between this area and the Varana bank was adorned with more than half of the important shrines of Varanasi.

Naturally Hiüen Tsang-s eyes fell on the array of Gold temples and kalasas stretching upto the great gold temple-top of Visvesvara standing on the Visvesvara hill (the highest in Varanasi), and the seasoned traveller was struck with the splendour and glory of a well preserved town.

In course of years the population on the southern bank of the Varana outnumbered the population of the northern bank where Visvanatha 'reigned'. This was obviously due to the constant move- ment of 'refugees' who wanted to escape the feudal wars and religious strife of the southern principalities.

At last when Chandradeva (1080), king of the Gahadavalas, him- self decided to shift his fortifications to the southern bank, and where he built up a very strong fort, the commercial community, as well as the wealthy people, shifted too. Thus the northern bank of the Varana went gradually out of favour. That bank was (1) more open to enemy attacks, (2) it provided protection to the great market- place, as well an easy access from the river; and lastly, (3) the popu- lation could easily settle in the lower slopes of the Visvesvarakhanda and outer reaches of the Omkarakhaṇḍa, which they did not want to disturb.

It should be borne in mind that although the new town was principally composed of 'refugees', they were extremely cautious about maintaining the sanctity and quiet of the holy hills. These remained undisturbed upto the second century of the Christian era.

Thus the main thrust of the refugees settled on the strip of land between the north reaches of Omkarakhanda and the south reaches of the famed Visvesvarakhanda.

II

When we consider the principal holy shrines, lakes and rivers of Varanasi, we discover that almost all these were situated in and around the Trilocana hill, the Omkara hill, the Bindumadhava hill, and the highest, the Visvesvara hill.

This is a very important landmark mentioned in the Puranas. This area is marked out by (1) the five rivers of Pancaganga, (2) the town deity Kasi Devi, (3) the river and lake of Mandakini, and (4) the Macchodari catchment. The entire area is described as Omkarakhanda. Within the most holy ground, Omkarakhanda we find located the all important shrines of Trilocana, Kalabhairava, Omkaresvara, Kalesvara, Tripura Bhairavi, Kalakupa, Kṛttivasesvara, Madhyamesvara, Avimuktesvara, Mangala Gauri, Dantahasta Bighnesvara or Bada Ganesa, Visalaksi, Bhavani, Sankaṭa, Varahi, Kapardisvara, Barkarikunda, Bindumadhava, Agnisvara, Viresvara, Candresa, Jyesthesvara, Bhutabhairava, Manikarnika, Cakratirtha, Dandapani, Lalita Devi, Dhunḍiraja, Saksivinayaka, Tarakesvara, Dharmesa, Mṛtyunjaya, practically all the deities held important in Hindu Varanasi.

The list would contain whatever is Varanasi worth from the point of view of pilgrimage. It is remarkable that in comparison to this list no shrine of importance is located in Kedarakhanda except Kedara. Such shrines as that of Durga Sankaṭamocana are of modern origin. Besides these, in Kedarakhanda there are some unorthodox Bhairava, Bir and Tantra shrines. These are Baijnatha, Batuka Bhairava and Kamaccha. These heterodox shrines significantly in-dicate places where mystic recluses cultivated practices of sects of Uma-Mahesvara, Vama-marga, Pisacas and Bhūtas. Obscure sects of Siddhas found free indulgence in fairly guarded seclusion. The whole area was covered with a thick growth of wood even a hundred years back.

On reaching the level grounds to the west, we reach the great lake of Pisacamocana, and Pitrkunda with the three Vir temples

around. From Kabiracaura to the Kedara hills, going by the western border of the present town, we do not meet with any important shrine, except Dasasvamedhesvara, Bhutesvara, and the Godavari. Near this river there is Agastyesvara mentioned in K. Kh. With the exception of Kedara and Hariscandra ghats this area has not been held important in K. Kh. Around the area lying between Kamaccha to the west and Godhowlia to the east were located a number of lakes and ponds of various sizes. The entire south-west of Varanasi as we know it now, was left undeveloped covered with a thick forestry where in quiet spiritual hideouts saints and people with spiritual leanings made their shifting habitats. Some of those wild hermitages had left their mark in secluded areas existent even six or seven decades back.

In fact this area had been an abandoned one until the times of the later Mughals. Upto late eighteenth century no developments in these parts were visible. People were not interested in these parts. The pressure of interest, both commercial and religious, kept the migrating population attached to the northern borders of the present city. The developments along the banks, and the construc- tion on the hill-sides came to existence in sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, a little before the British took over.

When the later Mughals ran into difficult times due to the Durrani, Abdali and Rohilla attacks, in exchange of assistance from the Hindus the helpless Emperor had to grant certain favours. The Maratha leaders were permitted to get the Varanasi temples, which had been destroyed by Aurangzeb, and the Pathan Emperors, re- constructed and repaired. This provided an opportunity for reinstating the pride of Varanasi.

The city was put back in its pristine glory. Religious principles could take a back seat when an empire's future was at stake.

Taking advantage of this royal sanction those grand 'ghats' of Varanasi, which form the chief attraction of the riverside, and the beauty of which casts spells on locals and tourists alike, were constructed at a break-neck speed.

The Hindu royalties of India, roused by this opportunity, vied with each other to 'reconstruct' Varanasi, and decorate her legitimate magnificence by raising along the riverside a string of the most durable and the most noble constructions of that age, or of any age. The riverside architecture of Varanasi is a standing monument to the engineering and architectural skills of the Indian builders of the time.

These historical interludes go to prove that the famous 'ghats' of Varanasi had no existence prior to the times of the third emperor Mughal, Akbar. The part of Varanasi was not included in the Buddhist, Mauryan, Thaneshwaran or Sunga records. If we ransack records of K. Kh., K. Mtm., or TVK, we find no glimpses of the ghats. The only few names that knock against our memory are (1) Pancaganga, (2) Dasasvamedha (more known since the Gahadavalas) and (3) Manikarnika. The last one, now known as a crematory ground, along with the Cakratirtha used to be renowned as 'bathing' tirthas. A question may pertinently arise, why the new constructions had abandoned the traditional Varana front? Why was a new front chosen?

Several possibilities suggest a correct answer.

1. The Varana itself had so silted that seasonal floods inundated the banks over a large area;

2. The old temples and holy-shrines were so demolished, and so many mosques were constructed that reconstruction would prove impractical.

3. Such constructions would involve two complexities:

(a) Mosques already superimposed on temples had to be demolished. For various reasons, both social and political, this proved impractical.

(b) Most of the converted Hindus had stuck to their ancestral properties. It was impractical to uproot them, or built temples within their neighbourhood.

4. Through years of steady neglect the Macchodari Nala had fallen into disuse, and the easy navigating link to Bisesarganj Market had to be replaced by other alternative approaches. The landing near the present Rajghat (Malavya-bridge-end) was found much more practicable.

5. The elevation between Prahlad ghat, Rama ghat and Pancaganga ghat was found architecturally a far more attractive proposition.

If the well built ghats with their flights or steps crowned with magnificent palaces and temple were not there, what did the river- side look like without them? Who lived there? How the high hills were being put to use?

K. Kh. is eloquent in describing the Anandakanana range. The hills formed the favourite resorts of the spiritual students. Hermit- ages flourished there. The description of such places as Bhutesvara, Brahmasarovara, Agastyakuṇḍa and Patalesvara reads even today vividly attractive.

No urbanity extended its sacrilegious hands on these hills. The sedate and quiet Godavari flowed down to what is known as the Dasasvamedha ghat and met the Ganga at a point now known as Prayag ghat, known by its two landmarks, the red-temple built by the Rani of Puthia, and the underground shrine of Sulatankesvara.

Almost all the ghats of Varanasi still bear-names of famed Houses of Hindu princes. There are however two exceptions: one, the celebrated Causatthi ghat. This was constructed in the early seventeenth century by the hapless Bengal feudal chief Pratapaditya; and the extremely beautiful Manmandir ghat, a monument to Raja Mansingh of Jaipur. His descendant Sawai Jaisingh, an astronomical wizard, built here the famous observatory, because of which the ghat bears the name of Manmandir (observatory) ghat.

In fact this was the ancient Varahi ghat, near to the Mir ghat, which is really speaking the Visvanatha ghat of today, near to the Lalita ghat. The presence of Varahi, Lalitasundari, Tripuresvari, Visalaksi and Kalika, a whole range points out to its Tantric lineage, particularly of the 'Left' mould.

It may again be borne in mind that the very presence of these Tantric seats in this area stands in dire contrast to the extremely dense population which appears to have gobbled up the ancient severe spirituality of the place.

Of course this latter feature has been an imposition on the earlier quiet enforced by moving population from the north banks of the Mandakini and Varana.

This ancient temple of Visvanatha on the hills, also known as the Moksavilasa, stood on the peak, at a little distance from the

Ganga. Pilgrims were advised by the scriptures to take bath in the Manikarnika and Cakratirtha before visiting the shrine. Manikarnika was thus the popular ghat marked out as a convenient approach to the great temple of Visvesvara, also known as Moksavilasa in the chronicles.

After the demolition of that great temple, and with the construction of the present temple on the south of Jnanavapi, Lalita ghat and Mir ghat were more favoured for a bath before visiting the present smaller shrine.

To the best of our knowledge, barring these expansions, the low lands lying between the Godavari stream and the Agastyesvara point to the north, and the Asi-point to the south (that is between mod- ern Godhowlia, and Sivala and Lanka), the entire section had been lying abandoned. We have noted that this area was covered with a woody overgrowth, and patches of primary forests (later acquired by Rani Bhavani of the House of Natore).

The fallow lands, covered with these trees were the hideouts of the anti-socials generally, and of the Aghories, Bhairavas and magic- making Vama-margis (all of them reminding us of the Uma- Mahesvara cult) in particular.

IV

There is a strip of land starting from the present Visvanatha lane, going across the Dasasvamedha Road through the Bhutesvara lane, right upto the temple of Kedara and Hariscandra ghats. After cross- ing the Hariscandra Road, the same lane goes right across to Lanka and the University, past the Asi bridge (the Asi fort of the ancient days).

This important arterial lane of Varanasi of today had been just a track through a wooded hilly range. Yet it reminds us of the era of the Afghans and the Mughals, in whose times it was a conventional foot track cutting through a dense forest spread naturally over a range of hills. Names such as Aia-ke-Barh, Terhi Nim, Belwaria, etc. still remind us of the times when a locality could be known only through the presence of a tall tree sentinelling as the lord of the forest. Localities are still known by the name of Vir, a Ganesa, a Kali or an ancient banyan tree, or a well or pond revered as an object of worship.

As the princes started to build up Varanasi, their attention was focused on this part of the city where they could expect the least re- sistance for construction on the plea of religious shrines and puritanic touchiness.

The new builders selected naturally an area where religious objections could not be raised in protest against growth (keeping away from untouchables).

They selected the Anandakanana range which stood on the extensive funeral grounds with the Mahasmasana of Hariscandra on the south-end and the Manikarnika on the north. There were none to object, not the priests who protected the temples, neither the population who would be displaced, nor the merchants who ran popular shopping centres.

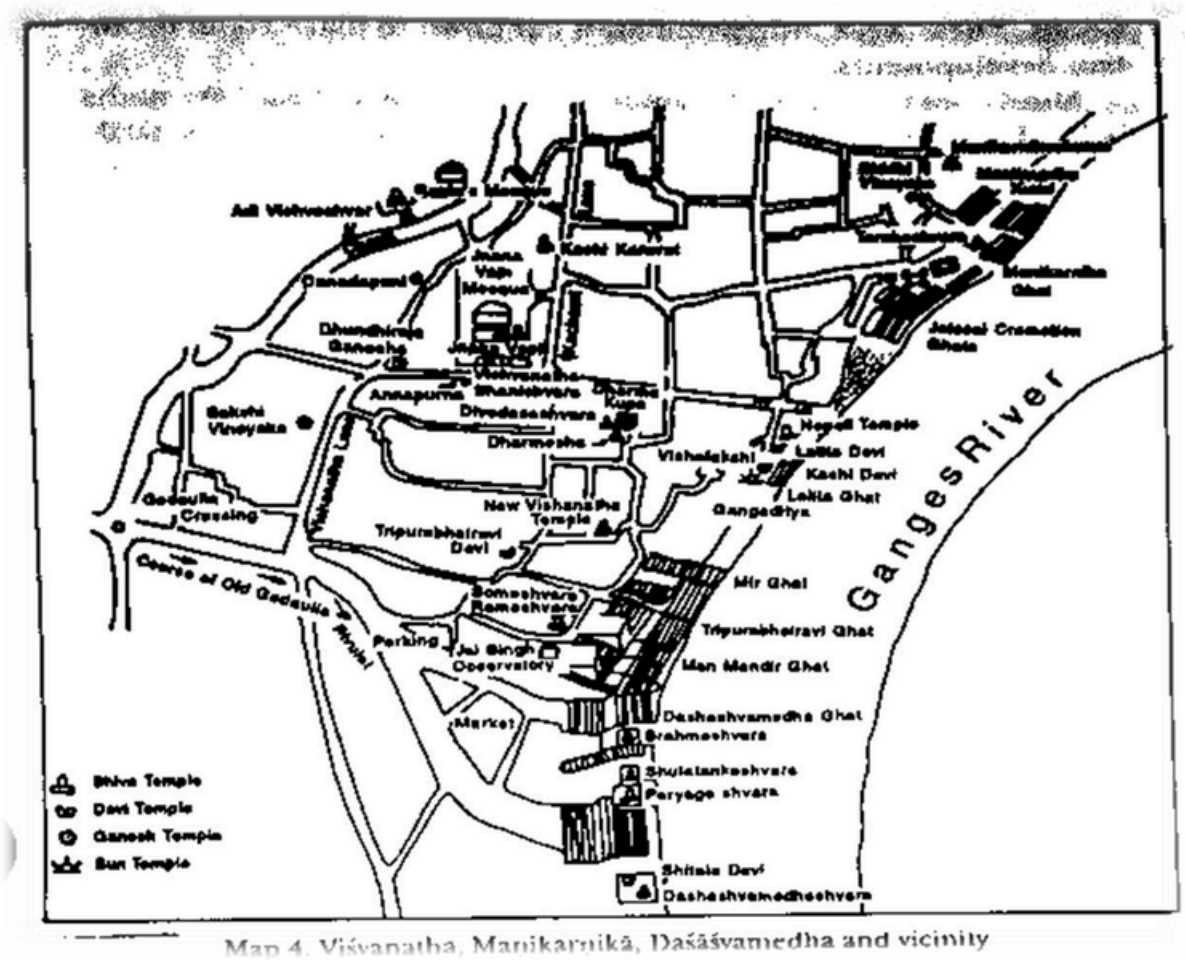
Objections could be raised by the humble religious devotees who had from times immemorial inhabited the woodland. But after the long-drawn battles ranged between the Bhara-Sivas, Hindus and Buddhists, the range had mostly been abandoned, and the few who still clung to it, moved towards the western

marshes near Revatikunda (Reoritalab), Batukanatha, Kamaccha, Khojwah and Gaivi.

Through the royal blessings and through the high skills of their engineers and workmen, a group of the finest crop of buildings adorned the riverside eversince the seventeenth century. For political reasons constructions were held back for another hundred years. But again these were started by the end of the seventeenth, and finished before the eighteenth, in record time.

Human habitants around this area gradually descended down to the west, where at the far end there existed several large pools, the largest was named Reoritalab, the ancient Revati Puskarini. On this slope ran yet another modern artery road, the University Road, connecting Chowk Godhowlia and the University. The British extended and widened the ancient track. This main road of modern days, and the old lane running on the crest of the hills run almost parallel.

If for a moment we could forget and eliminate the latest constructions, we could almost visualise the wooded hills painted by dilettante painters of the time several of whom have luckily survived. These paintings reflected the Varanasi of the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Even the author had seen stretches of such woods. These were indiscriminately cut down to make room for urban developments.



Map 4. Visvanatha, Manikarnika, Dasasvamedha and vicinity

Mind goes back to Sankaṭamocana, Baijnatha and Sankaramatha behind it, Belwaria, Kolhua, Gaivi, Khojwah and of course Reoritalab, the last one overgrown with thousands of toddy palm trees. It was a haunt of antisocials given to murder, loot, drinking and gambling.

There are, however, a few exceptions. These refer to the Ranas of Udaipur, the Holkars of Indore and the Maharaja of Darbhanga. They built exactly on the hill tops. The long flights of steps still bear witness to their daring challenges, and to the skill of their engi- neers and team of workers. The formidable height of the hills could still be gauged from the flights of stairs of Kedara ghat, Raja ghat, Parrey ghat, Causatthi ghat, Munshi

ghat, Ahalyabai ghat followed further north by Manmandir ghat. Pancaganga ghat and Sankata ghat actually follow the same range, although these are situated further north.

Whereas the ghats to the north of Manikarnika, Scindhia and Pancaganga indicate another range, actually they belong to the Omkarakhanda.

The reason why these hills, later built up by princes were studiously avoided by the refugees from the north of Varana is yet another indication that the hills had been covered with woods, described in the chronicles as the 'heart' of the Anandakananam, and at places probably, inhabited by the fearsome Bhairavas, Nagas, Mahesvaras, Kapalikas and Kalamukhas. In the last days of the decay of the Andakananam, stray gangs of rowdies, thuggees, and professional miscreants had entered the woods.

Devotees belonging to the Mahesvara and the Ganesa cults never appreciated being disturbed. The Batuka Bhairava resort and the Ganesamohalla localities indicate the existence of these sects and these hideouts. The only Tantric centre of Adi Sankaracarya in Varanasi is situated in this area.

In fact 75 years back (the author shatteringly recalls) it was a common game amongst the 'Banarasi' desperadoes to stake a wager to attest their manliness by accepting a challenge to cross, all alone, at night, this weird wilderness. According to the current 'rumours', the area was filled with ghosts, gnomes, ghauls, Pisacas, and spirits of all descriptions, specially of the non-Hindu variety of soul that cried for liberation.

This is the area where exists to this day a secluded tank reputed for a bizarre practice. Annually, on a certain day, hundreds of

women bathe in this holy tank in the nude, with the hope of either getting a child, or to express the gratitude for having given birth to one. The tank is dedicated to the Sun-God Lolarka, and is tucked away from public gaze.

Now the township has grown. The memory of the wooded marshy expanse has been concretised and petrified by numerous constructions of unending townships, colonies, hospitals, colleges, electrical powerhouses, water works and police stations.

The tank, and the ghats, magnificent to look at, stand as a monu- ment to human effort to impose urbanisation at the cost of a natural wooded hill.

Yet tale tell echoes call out from the dark past. Names such as Ganesamohalla, Awadhgarbi, Kenarama-astana, Sankhodhara, Deo- ria-Bir, Bhoju-Bir signify mysterious sinister past. Ganesa temples, Bira shrines, sun-shrines, Narasingha shrines, all were covered by a blanket reputation of shady doings and un-Vedic practices.

The oldest shrine of Ganesa in Varanasi, incidentally, is supposed to be abiding its time south of the famous Durga temple. It is the only place in Varanasi where to this day Tantric animal sacrifice is still performed openly.

Tantra, and Uma-Mahesvara cult of left-asceticism flourished in this area to the frowned chagrin of extreme Vedic purists.

V

This crest of hills along the Ganga stretching from the Chetsingh fort in the south and Manikarnika in the north reflect the main woodland. The Anandakananam stretched from here

to the slopes now known as Reoritalab and Laksmikunda, Benia and Pisacamocana. Here was situated the shrine of Bhutesvara, and the Bhute- svara pond. These are no longer there. The pristine depth of the pond could still be somewhat gauged from the flights of steps still running along the round- about declivity where stood even 50 years back three very large banyan trees, thus making a peaceful grove by a deep pond. It has now been covered by a public road, and a flourishing market.

VI

The construction of the ghats apart, western slopes of the hills, by and large, remained almost undeveloped from the Bhutesvara-point to Kedara-point. The first changes to this area was introduced in the middle of eighteenth century. The close strip of land up the wooded hills from Dasasvamedha to Hariscandra ghat began to be populated through the gifts of a feudal chief of Bengal, Rani Bhavani, who built up (1753) the area for making gifts of houses to Brah- mins.

This location is now known as the overpopulated Bengaliṭola, where stand to this day, many of the shrines constructed by Rani Bhavani. Soon many other landlords of lower Bengal followed her example and built up what is still known as 'Bengalitola'. As a result this area has been filled with a number of Tantric shrines, Kali, Tara, Bhuvanesvari, Rajarajesvari, Jagaddhatri, Bhadrakali, Catuḥ- şasṭhi Yogini, besides shrines of Gopala, Kṛsna and Bhavani.

This evidence of Hindu regeneration was confirmed by the efforts of the pious rich of southern India. Under the protection of the Great Jangama Svami and the followers of the great Adi

Sankara, the Tamils, Telugus, Kannadas and even the Malayalis opened up 'Satras' (open and free eating houses) for pilgrims and the poor. Finally this area became one of the most overpopulated parts of the already congested Varanasi.

The changes that came over the wooded sections between the Hariscandra ghat-Sivala area in the east, and Gaivi, Kalhua, Kamaccha, Sankaramatha and Sigra-rath-talla to the west have taken place within the living memory of many. Actually the human habitations in this area has spiled over to the university on the one hand, and on the other, to the Marwadih Railway Station and be- yond. This growth has mushroomed within our living memory after the Second World War.

VII

When we speak of foreign attacks, molestation of religious places, we mean the regular disturbances in the area of the new township which cropped up as a result of the shift from the northern bank of the Varana to its southern bank under the supposed protection of the Rajghat fort (1080).

The Islamic attacks on Varanasi did hardly affect the trans-

Varana settlements on the southern bank, which any way, thanks to the long drawn Brahmin-Buddhist feuds (specially of the times of the Sungas, and Kanvas) has been razed to the grounds already.

Subuktgin, Sikandar Lodi, Mahmud Shah Sharqui, or Aurangzeb himself did not have the least idea about the Dodo named Sarnath. When Todarmal's son Govardhan decided to raise a monument to 'Humayun's one-day-stop' near Caukhandi (along the present Sarnath Road) he too knew nothing of Mrgadava or Sarnath.

The entire Rajghat plateau and its environs spreading upto the Varana bridge (inclusive of such localities as Nate Imli, Jagatgunj, Queen's College, Lahura-Bir) should be of immense interest to ar- chaeologists. They should concentrate on the lands overrun by the two railways, the railway stations, the mohallas known as Jaitpura and Alaipura, and particularly on the land occupied by the exten- sion of the Grand Trunk Road, and the Basant College complex.

This area, together with the area described as Omkarakhanda has been devastated time and again by foreign attacks.

These attacks, at first religious, were made serially by (a)

Saivas and Ganapatyas, (b) Vaisnavas and Saivas, (c) Hindus and Buddhists, and of course by (d) the Muslim attacks. Finally this area lost its identity to the English zeal for building roads, railways and bridges. As a result we do not miss the Hindu landmarks alone, we also miss the great institutions, the ashramas, the sangharamas. We also miss the chaityas and the temples mentioned both by Fa-hien and Hiüen Tsang.

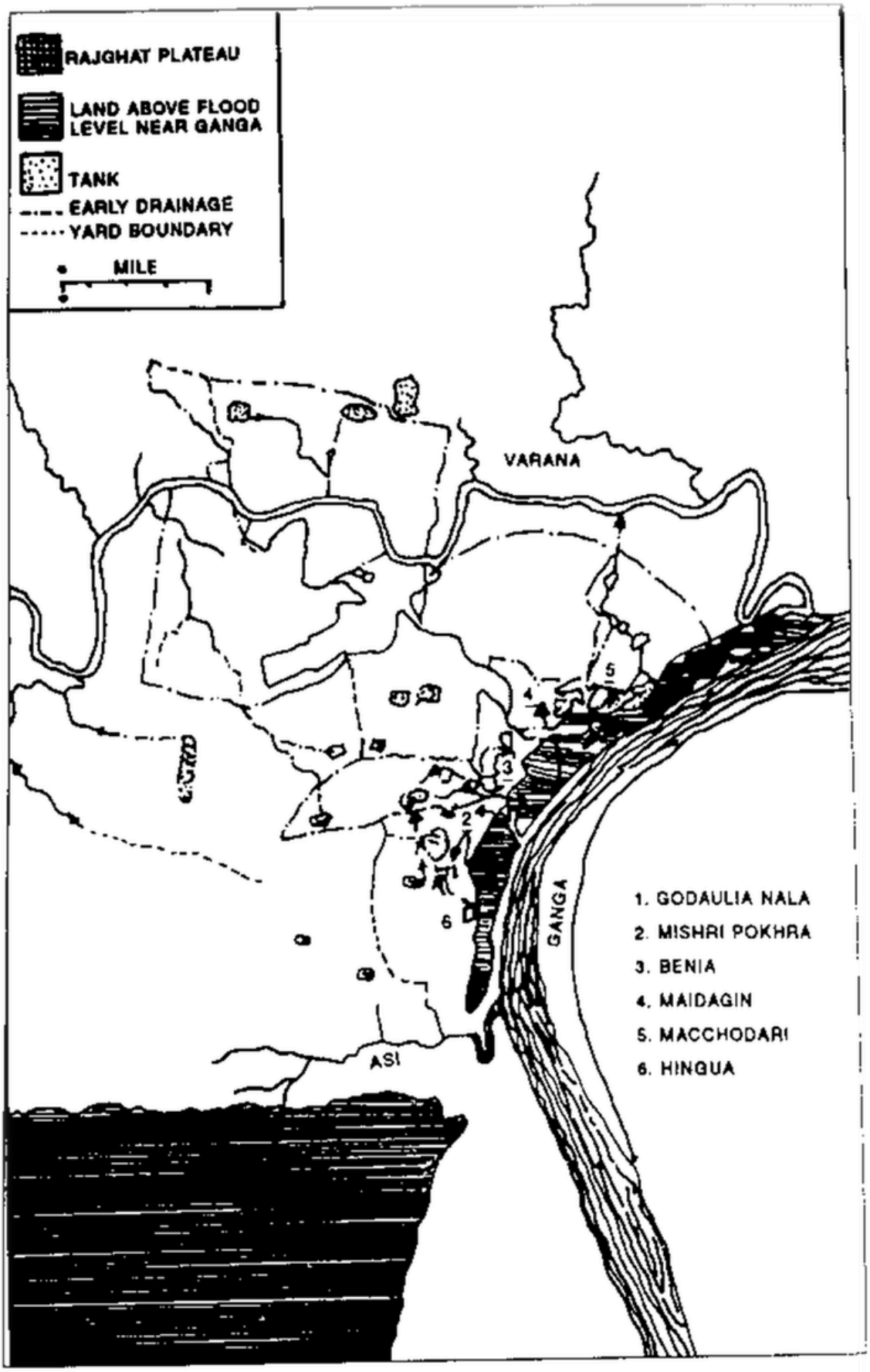
To regard the Muslims alone responsible for the devastation is

a politicised simplistic approach. It is a blunder, both prejudicial, and factually untenable.

Muslim attacks were restricted by and large to the area of Omkara and Visvesvara Khandas. Aurangzeb himself had particularly kept his attention focused on such wealthy shrines as Visvesvara and Jnanavapi (revived during the days of Akbar), and the great Bindu- madhava temple. These, and the wealthy temples, such as Omkara, Kṛttivasa, Mṛtyunjaya, Avimuktesvara and Barkarikunda, came un- der his hammer, more for loot, than for any other motive. The un- thinking bigot

wanted to satisfy his zeal also by molesting the Govinda temple of Mathura, along with many other temples of Vrindavan.

The ill-conceived zeal met with dire consequences leading to the total eclipse of the Great Mughals, and usurpation of the entire Empire by a trading community from Europe.



Map 5. Banares with the Rājghāṭ Plateau showing early drainage

The insensate destruction of the holy places still rankles as irritations to Hindu memory specially because of deliberate construction of mosques over those places held dear by the majority. The large community of the local converts, so much hated and derided by a proud but unsympathetic social order, keeps alive the forces of irritation, which is doing no good to a vibrant living society.

VIII

In destroying the panorama, and with that the sanctity of this important area of Varanasi, the greatest responsibility must stick to the arrogant British attitude towards ancient Indian monuments. (The British mercantile greed at one time had negotiated even a sale of the Taj Mahal.)

In the highly imperialistic view of the English nothing Hindu was worth any regard. They had concluded, like the foolish conquistadors of 'Latin' Americans, that a rack of Western books contained more wisdom than a whole library of these Eastern 'Jabbers'. Their spiteful fear of the Muslims, and their deep scorn of the Hindus had blinded their good sense. Temperance is rarely a virtue of deliberate molesters.

They for instance were totally annoyed with the Raja of Kasi, be- cause that 'small' feudal chief had dared to stand against the British might, and made Warren Hastings take to a disgraceful precipitate flight. (What an embarrassment for the high and mighty East India Company.)

Piqued by that defeat, the British town-cleaners and engineers sealed up the lakes, Macchodari and Mandakini. Did not the army of the Whites taste defeat on the banks of these accursed lakes? With vengeance, typical of thwarted vanity, the

erasement of this area became obligatory. The consequent devastations were complete. That was not all, the area was finally built up with post offices, police stations, public buildings, hospitals and gardens. Railways over- ran the district, and a steel bridge spanned the Ganga which gave the engineers an excuse to change the very face of this part of Varanasi. The ancient layout went haywire.

The most lamentable loss inflicted by these constructions was the loss of major historical evidences. These lie buried under the trunk roads, bridge approaches, rail-tracks, public services. The re-nowned Omkarakhanda, with the great lakes and the Mandakini river, parts of Visvanathakhanda were for ever ruined by running roads from the Chowk-hill to the university, past Godhowlia. A number of streams and ponds and lakes got buried in the process. And a new Varanasi was foisted on the minds of the people, who soon forgot the genuine Anandakananam and its arboreal attractions.

All this is memory now.

Yet Varanasi refuses to die. There appears to be an element of the salamander and the sphinx in the spirit of Varanasi. It always rose from its ashes.

Along the banks of the good old Varana great festivals and fairs are still held periodically with great eclat: Ramalila, Nagapancami, Solono, Karua Cautha, Ganesa Cautha, Nak Kataiya are some of the fairs. To this could be added Sakti fairs like Mangala Gauri, Bagesvari, Bhimacandi. To this we may further add the unorthodox fairs, at- tached to the Natha sect, and to the Nagas, such as the fair of Pisacamocana,

Gorakhaṭilla, Lolārkakuṇḍa (or Karanghaṇṭa), and Ghaṇṭākarṇa

The last one mentioned has been already referred to. It is an exclusively restricted fair, still observed every winter near Asi. This is the only tank where ritualistically mothers, would-be-mothers and women seeking a child still go for a bath mostly in the nude. After the bath they leave their old clothes there, and put on new colourful garments with songs and merriment. Males are totally barred, and strict guards ensure the freedom and seclusion of the devotees.

In Varanasi there is no other tank where a nude bath is virtually enjoined. Since this is related to the worship of the 'sizzling-dancing-lolling' Sun-God, Lolarka, and since the girls who are to bathe in the nude, automatically the rites significantly point towards a myth-laden tribal and plebeian past.

As Sun-worship generally entered the Indian society from the great Persian tradition of Marduk and Mihira, and as Varanasi attracted many sun-worshipping tribes from the Gandhara and Kusana interlude, the Sun-God has as many as eight important shrines in Varanasi.

Judged from a historical perspective festivals and fairs provide the only genuine and authentic signatures of the spirit of the people on the parchment of time.

Considered in cool retrospection, what a heinous tragedy was being enacted unscrupulously on a people rendered submissive by the failure of its prospects in 1857. The avenging mood of the imperialist tyrant unceremoniously brutalised the religious sentiments of an alien people, which more than indicated their stored up spite and spirit of vengeance. The early rulers from

the British isles were not too conscious of the environmental demands of the people they were destined to govern.

Varanasi's soul had collapsed when the woods and the streams were indiscriminately vandalised by her foreign white rulers.

6

Varanasiis Born

I

For students of Hindu evolution a study of Varanasi would prove to be very revealing.

On has to breathe the air of the days bygone, and feel the throb of the times. The steady quiet rhythm of the spiritual woodland should be allowed to seep through one's intellectual perception.

Only then a correct review of the reconstructed Varanasi would come alive. Varanasi would be rediscovered in the light of facts.

The growth of Varanasi records fundamentally the growth of the Hindu milieu.

This, however, should not tempt us to indulge in colourful romanticism, and ignore realities. We have enough solid materials within our reach to guide us along the correct path.

In almost all the treatises available on Varanasi (Buddhist and Jaina records, Puranas, Epics, Tirtha-kalpas and Grhyasūtras) we come across with poetical descriptions of this group of hills on the Ganga, where the river takes a sudden and sharp turn towards the north, deviating from its destined eastern progress.

As it is the picture provides a dramatic contrast of shades. The eastern grey and barren sands spreads all along the city's length, which runs as deep at places as a broad kilometre. The scene gradually yields to a dark-green-pale-yellow spread of fertile vegetation. Clusters of humble mud-and-straw hutments form straggling ham- lets, which jostle together, as inhabitants of the Indo-Gangetic plains are accustomed doing.

But the western bank is different. It gradually lifts itself up and up, as if to touch the skies. Those uplifted steep embankments provided by nature are made of a firm sandstone base bordered with a bed of hard-core strong-gritted shingles which prevents erosion from the river's sudden turn.

The encampment is nothing but the extension of the Chunar and Vindhya hill formations. The range of the hills is distinctly di- vided into three elevated points, which could be called 'peaks', had the range been much higher than a nature-built super-embankment.

The three peaks made poets sing of the Siva-trident, on which they claim, rests the holy Varanasi, 'the pleasure-garden' (Ananda- kananam) of Siva and Gauri. Reputedly here is Siva

perennially en- gaged in cosmic dalliance with Sakti, merged in the joy of creation' (the very concept is Tantric).

There being no break in the joy, the two are ever so united as not to be parted at all (giving the place the other name, Avimukta, where there is no disengagement).

At a very distant past these hills had been covered with very beautiful growths of natural orchards and woodland.

In over fifty verses, K. Kh. (Kasikhaṇḍam, seventh century AD, the only authentic reference book and directory of Kasi coming out of the ancient chronicling vogue) enlists a variety of the precious trees. The absolute peace that prevailed in the woods "made mice nibble the ears of cats, and little fawns seek from a tigress precious protection".

Wherever there are hills, there are valleys, large or small. The whole panorama of Varanasi, from the Asi to the Varana, was formed of an undulating surface broken by hills and valleys, with rivers murmuring past, and forming ponds and tanks, even lakes of clear potable water.

The layout is not imagined, although the present disposition of Varanasi would not ever support this idyllic image. But past records, and present day echoes of names of localities, as well as habits of the people still remind us of the eroded times. These names of localities and salient features, like sentinels from the past, still revive memories of magnificent green mansions lost for ever.

Of the most famous streams, we have already named a few, the Mandakini, the Godavari, the Dhutapapa, the Kirana and of course the famous duo, the Asi and the Varana.

Anandakananam must have been a blissful spiritual resort, an area covered with hermitages. The scholarly, the yogic, and the re- tired, lived here in quiet seclusion.

But in living they never forgot the sanctity of the place, which they dared not defile by their life-style. Anandakananam was exclusively meant for the spiritually minded alone.

The entire Anandakananam was Mother Parvati's personal abode. Here She kept house with Her Lord Siva. As such it was considered to be a private retreat, holy of holies, a sacred and secluded area, where the pious and the disciplined alone could think of residing.

Regular householders had no place here. They could not 'build' to live here, according to the scriptural injunctions contained in K. Kh.

Living here on the hills was as good as living within a temple, within church premises. No kind of defilement, physical, mental or vocal, no noise, no false words could be permitted within its boundaries. There were scriptural 'prohibitions' against gifting lands to Brahmins, who were not expected to accept land on the hills. The scriptures were against it. No householder could settle in Ananda- kananam.

The Anandakananam hill could not 'house' a village, much less a city. Normal acts such as cooking, ablutions, even regular privy functions were 'out of bounds' for the Anandakananam surroundings. Inhabitants had to climb down the hills westward, and enter the woods and marshes of the western foot hills and valleys. (Localities now known as Misir Pokhra, Reoritalab, Belgharia, Luxa etc., areas not mentioned in K. Kh. or K. Mhtm.)

Conventionally, the regular Varanasi residents used to boat across the river for answering such natural calls. The Banarasi-s still use a local inoffensive innuendo to mean such a function. 'Bahar-jai', 'Par- jai', 'Bahar phire jai' (going out, going across the river, going for a return from 'out') still would mean 'going across the river to answer nature's call'.

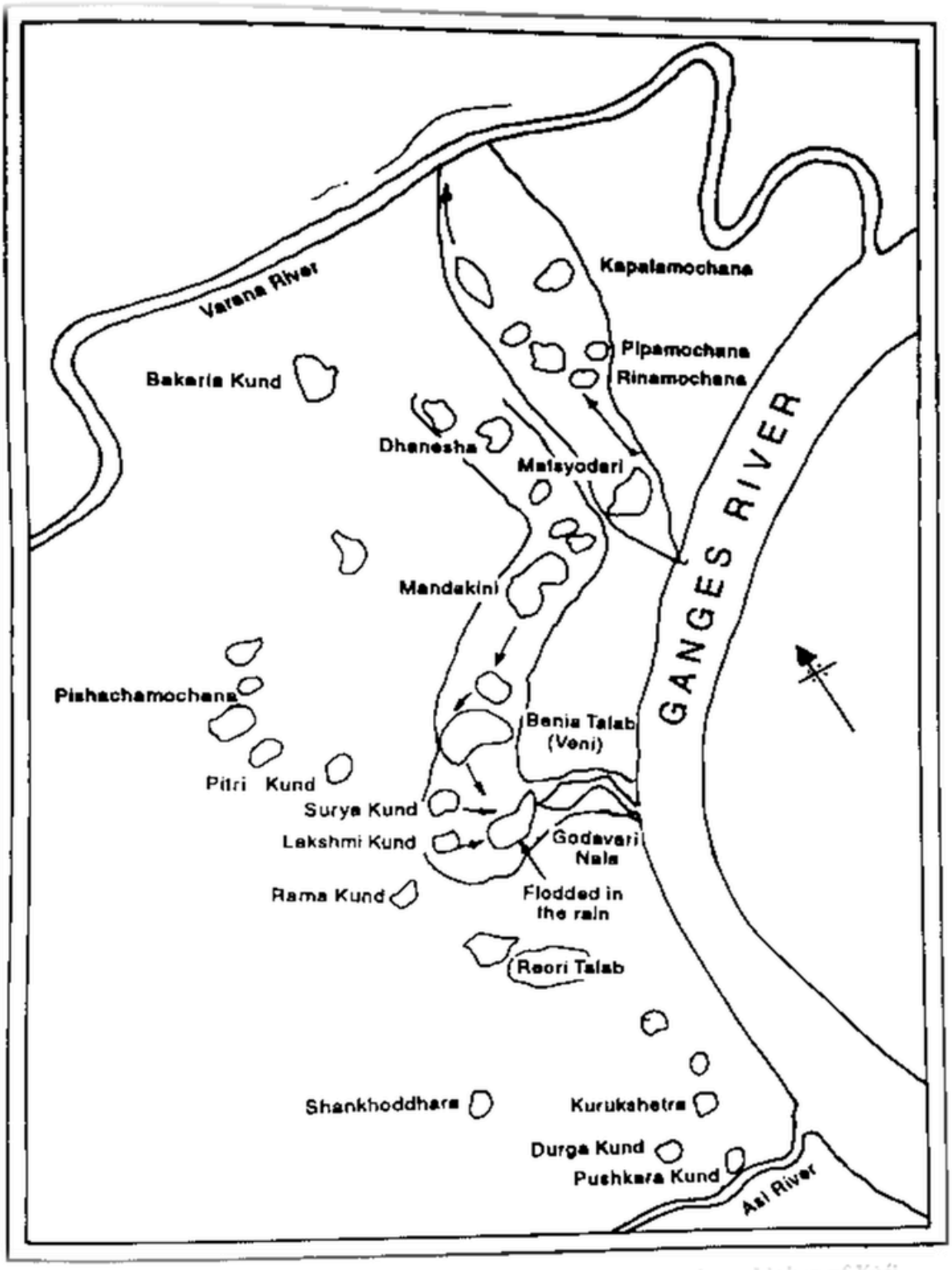
Those who lived on the western, south-western slopes used the same words for visiting the wastelands lying to the west of the hills. Defiling Anandakananam, Siva's abode, where lived the sages and the yogi-s, was considered the height of impropriety.

How could in that hoary past Varanasi be imagined as a

crowded city, which it is today? Its culture did not sanction a crowd; its history enforced quiet.

The raids of Ghazni (AD 1030), Ghors (1144) and Sharquis (twelfth century) left Varanasi's sacrosanct sanctity raped and ruined. Once defilement set in, any one did anything he liked, ignoring all scriptural directives. The foreign raiders derived a special kick to their white-hot ego by hurting the sentiments of the raped, where it pained the most i.e., hurting their religious susceptibilities.

Anandakananam was thus the exclusive creation of the Siva-people, for their pre-Aryan devotions to Siva and Sakti. So reports the scriptures, so confirms history, only if we transpose the Siva-people for the divinity Siva. In other words 'Siva lived here' should be read as 'the non-Aryan Siva-s regarded Varanasi as their exclusive habits'. Even the Aryans, in spite of their sustained thrust, failed to gain an absolute possession of Varanasi.



Map 6. James Prinsep's map ofBunarus, showing the ponds and lakesof Kasi

There is a legend in support ofthis.

After there marriage, Siva and Parvati were completely merged in the bliss of a married life. The sublime cosmic dalliance went on uninterrupted. The affair became a scandal for public discussions. When the two primal forces were locked in such a consuming exercise, the world became alarmed. Cosmic laws went haywire. Moni- tors of social propriety complained against the pair to Grand Mother Menaka, wife of Himalaya, and Mother of Parvati.

The scandalised old lady decided to discipline her shameless daughter, and the carefree mindless (Bhola) son-in-law in the process.

The two met. The mother reprimanded the embarrassed daughter. Amongst other things she reminded the daughter of the aristocratic lineage of her parental society. In contrast, her husband had been quite opposed to the chased refined life of the Aryan clan. King Himalaya, her father, had resented her to embrace in marriage a mere homeless yogi with no social credentials.

His habits of nakedness, drugs, keeping company of the wild aborigines, like the Nagas, Kiratas, Ganas, Siddhas, Guhyakas, Yaksas, Kinnaras, etc., embarrassed their social standing amongst the Devas.

The snubbing came thick and sharp. Parvati was mortified and went to her husband demanding private peace beyond the reaches of the busy bodies. She refused to live amongst the society of these sticklers of crass forms. (The cosmic creative process must remain a mystery, and make progress uninterruptedly.)

This stirred Siva into action. He sent his trusted emissaries to scout for a place where the social strictures of the Aryanised aristo- crats never reached. That place, secluded from all hum and bustle, and covered with a splendid forest, was Varanasi, which Siva placed on his trident, so that the worldly standards would not extend to its And there he lived with Parvati, ever after, in closest embrace and joy, with no one to interrupt the cosmic playfulness. Sakti and Siva, Energy and Matter, must remain inseparably together for the benefit of cosmic creativity. (Paryanka-bhutam Sivayoḥ nirantara sukhaspadam = Varanasi became the happy bed for the divine couple, Kasikhanḍa.)

At a later stage we shall deal with this aspect of the two Powers merging into One. It has its esoteric value. This involves the mysticism of Tantric practices and the mystique of the Samkhya philosophy. The sublime idea that involves this ideological interpretation has many facet to be considered. Inter alia these include, the Gana- syndrome, the cult of the mystic Darklady and the supreme Lord functioning in the comic play of creation, also known in Tantra parlance as the age-old Uma-Mahesvara cult,-and lastly, the confrontation between the turbulent Ganas and the touchy snobbery of the proud Aryans.

The appellation of Avimuktesvara, derived from the concept of the eternal Union of the two cosmic forces explained above, stuck to Varanasi.

The definition of Anandakananam rests on this aspect i.e., the Union of the two forces of Siva and Sakti in a secluded place wrapped in the Mystery of the Great unknown.

In Tantric esoteric language this expresses the mystic concept of the cosmic omphalos, i.e., the mystery-laden dark nave-hole

of the churning nubulae that sparks out bodies with life-properties with the aid of a 'congress', now described as an electron-proton con- gress.

The two primordial essential creative principles merge here in an inseparable invisible embrace. This kind of intense embrace brings life to the seed, and injects the power of multiplicating of life-forms into the material seed state.

It is a cosmic image conceived by the subtlest of the findings of human intellection reached through the extra powers of meditation.

In describing the significance of the name of Anandakananam K. Kh. has this to say. "The primal sphere of solid darkness, impen-etrable and mysterious, retained an innate potentiality for emergence in the forms of light and heat... and from that innate potentiality evolved the urge to propagate and multiply.... That pri- mal urge generated an expression of energy, which sought forms, and was known as Prakyti (kṛti-to act, to give shape). Forms in Prakṛti assumed the limitations of attributes. She, the Prakyti, the Negative Power, was thus known to be the primal female factor, providing 'the field', the ksetra, for ploughing, sowing, sprouting and bearing.

(Ksetra as a term in Tantra has been reserved for indicating, the creating field, the Yoni-mandalam. Generally it has been described as a triangle, comprising of three meeting arms of the primal at- tributes: sattva, rajas and tamas.) Hence Varanasi is a ksetra. It is the Garden of joy, Anandakananam.

She, the Power, was the feminine Principle, Prakyti, and He, Siva was the Super-Male, the Ultimate Master-Principle, the He factor Isvara (Isa+vara, i.e., power + paramountcy). In this

symbolic ksetra the two are engaged in a perpetual act of ecstatic "Union for releasing cycles after cycles of the Life-phenomenon"."

II

And why not?

Was this not the Anandakananam? Was it not the Avimuktakşetra, with its tradition of a free living, away from the Aryanised social restrictions, moral handicaps, ritualistic servility to forms? (Paryanka- bhutam Sivayoḥ nirantara-sukhas-padam).

Anandakananam, on the contrary, adhered to a much, more ancient tradition, much older, and more popular than Brahmanically inspired Vedic impositions. It harboured a society of free-living with uninhibited dedication to the primal 'delights of the Two-in-One, and the One-in-Two', and cared little for the Henotheistic Nature- gods or, for invoking 'powers' for appeasement of Nature's fear- some aspects. It pictured a fundamental clash between the poetry of imagination, and the surveillance to life's demands, between idealism and reality.

This latter was the Gana-way of dedication, the Siva-way of delightful purposiveness. Here one seeks freedom-absolute and goes in quest of the absolute in Mukti, or Liberation of the senses which provide the only window for the self-in-body towards the self-in-creation. This was their way, a pre-Vedic primordial way, dedicated to the concept of life's uninterrupted continuity. This they held to as the only real way.

From Nineveh, Babylon and Khmer, to Greece, Egypt, Cyprus, to Kanauj, Mathura, Ujjaini, Bhrgukaccha, Mahismati, Kalanjar, Khajuraho, Kausambi and Kasi the adoration of the

Life-Spirit had become an act of faith, a fervent homage raised for the Lord of the Living, the finale of which is still ringing through the verses of Kalidasa, Bana, Bhasa, Amaru, Kalhana, Bilhana, Vatsyayana, Asva- ghosa, etc.

The primal pair was united as were words united with meanings (Vagartha-viva-sampṛktau vagarthaḥ pratipattaye jagataḥ pitarau vande...). They, as Bhava and Bhavani, Siva and Siva, Uma and Mahesvara, had added significance to the name Anandakananam. This was indeed their a secluded cove of dalliance, the mystery-pocket of the Mahesvara cult. Here the Primal Principles were engaged in cosmic ramamanata, i.e., copulation-bliss, secured in evolving the life-cycles spin and grow and multiply.

This is the genesis of the name of Anandakananam, Rudravasa (home of the Rudra, who had been a terror to the yajna-loving Vedic ritualists).

K. Kh. (26.4-6) supports this view. We quote some of the verses.

1. Tata-stad-aikalenapi svairam viharata maya sva vigrahat svayam Sṛsṭa svasarinanpayini. (XXVI.22-23)

2. Yugapacca tvaya saktya sakam kala-svarupina mayadya-puruşenaitat ksetram capi vinirmitam.... (Ibid., 24)

3. Sa saktiḥ prakṛtiḥ prokta saḥ puman Isvaraḥ Paraḥ tabhyam ca rama- manabhyam tasmin ksetre ghatotbhava.... (Ibid., 24)

4. Mune pralaya, kale-pi na tat ksetram kadacana vimuktam hi Sivabhyam yad avimuktam tato viduh. (Ibid., 26)

5. Ananda kanda bijanam ankurani yala-s-tatah. Sreyani sarva lingani tasmin ananda-kanane avimuktamiti khyatam-asid ittham Ghatod- bhava. (Ibid., 34-5)

6. Anandakananam sambhoḥ cakrapuskarinim hareḥ parabrahmaiva suksetram lila-moksa samarpakam.

The verses have been quoted from different sections of K. Kh.,

and we could profitably translate some of the significant portions, and indicate that the un-Aryan tradition of Gana-Bhairava freedom lies at the inner core around which the unique holy city of Varanasi has emerged through the ages.

(Thus when I was feeling alone, (1) from my ownself I derived a Second to amuse me).... Together with Her as Sakti, we created our Field of two; She the moving Time, I, the Ever-Inert. (2) ... and the primal Male.... She has been called Prakyti (Nature's Power); and I have been called the Cosmic-Male; a magnetic Field was formed. In this Field... (Varanasi) the two (Powers) have been engaged in a cosmic perpetual union. (3) ... Even when the Cos- mos goes back to Chaos, O sage, this Union, in principle, shall never be disunited. (4) ... Hence this Field has been described as a 'Field of Unbroken Dalliance'-(a-vimukta).... The Siva-principle and the Sakti-principle are so engaged eternally.... Time projects; Time swallows.... (5) ... In that Field of ecstasy, as grass on a field, the germs of crystallised joy are strewn (for future continuous growth) in symbolised potential creativity (lingam). (6) ... This was Sambhu's (the Equaliser's) 'Pleasure-Garden' adorned with a bathing pool where the wheel of life spins for ever and ever. To be able to con- template on this Field is to contemplate on the Mystery of Cosmic Oneness (Para Brahma). This happy Field

confers liberation through positive joy and pleasure (of creation's beauty).

Obviously, the translation is not literal, which we do not need in this context. But it brings to focus the intent of the ancient lines written in the conventional symbolic and metaphorical language of legends.

The Tantric interpretation of the verses is not too deliberate.

The tradition of ascribing Tantric influence on ksetra in general (and particularly on the Avimukta ksetra, Varanasi) finds scriptural support, as we note in the following 1692, commentary on the Kasi- khandam.

Sivayoh ramamanayoḥ ananda-vijam pradurbabhuva, iti. Asmat ananda-kanda bija-bhumi-iti ananda-kananam. Asmat ghatat na vimuktih, na vislesaḥ, atah avimuktaḥ.'

It means: As the Sivas (Siva and Sakti) kept coupled, joy effused, and formed into seeds. The Field (of such a cosmic concept) had been thus strewn over with crystals of joy, and was appropriately described as Anandakananam. There being no possibility of any interruption in this cosmic perception of creation's mystery (contained within matter's expression into life-forms) the field of this spiritual congress is known as Anandakananam.

The antiquity of the holiness of Varanasi and Anandakananam lies deep into this kind of non-Aryan, non-Vedic Tantra concepts. At a much later date such concepts were supported also by some of the Upanisads. The orthodox Vedic schools, however, reject these Upanisads as heterodox compositions. In fact there is no time barrier in forming concepts, which formed

the very backbone of pre- Vedic society of the Ganas and autochthons of India.

Varanasi had already been steeped in this kind of philosophy of spiritual attainment at the time the Aryans came in.

The Aryans with their gods and forms of yajnas tried to make a breakthrough, and 'change' Varanasi. It was a stronghold of Tantric cults which laid a great faith in the concept of creation, and won- dered at the beauty of life. It was the basis of the genuine Siva- Bhairava cult, also known as the famed Uma-Mahesvara cult.

The forces on the sides of the autochthons proved to be too strong, and the aristocratic class-conscious intellectuals tried hard to resist and reform. But the proud irresistible forces of the Aryans, convinced of their superior spiritual gifts, failed to crush the combined forces of the Ganas, whom they were forced to appease and fraternise.

The present Varanasi is the final result of those years of strife leading to the establishment of the temples of the Ganas and Bhairavas. These temples with the deities stand as monuments of solemn vows exchanged between two warring 'forms' coming to a final peaceful settlement, which has held to this day. Varanasi is carefully surrounded with the shrines of Gana-devas and Bhairavas as 'guards' of the holy land. The Puranas are filled with stories of the strives always ending with the establishment of these shrines. We shall gradually unfold that story.

Inter alia the Gana-philosophy maintained that the Male and the Female principles are engaged in a sublime inescapable process of union. This produced in time the wholesome visiṣtadvaita

concept of "Two-in-One and One-in-Two". The function goes on eternally and uniterruptedly as a cosmic process. This is the Law, the rta of the Purusasukta in the Veda. Constant meditation on this aspect of the 'Beginning of Things' leads to a very satisfying ecstatic state leading to a sense of total liberation.

The mystery of Creation stands revealed, and the man so 'realised' accepts himself as a part of an Eternal Process.

The concept itself is elevating. Once realised and accepted, the appreciation of the concept breaks through all bars of caste and creed, restrictions and discriminations, and man meets man as one flower in a garland meets another flower, as a sheaf of wheat brushes shoulders with another sheaf.

This concept of a central cosmic origin based on the philosophy of lila and anandam (self-play and ecstasy) sanctions man to live in the full spirit of the Life-Vitae, which is Santam-Sivam-Advaitam (Tranquil, Good and Indiscriminate).

The basic Tantra and the Ultimate Tantra merge in this fundamental principle of Oneness. The Source of such a neat concept has been ably reflected by the ideogrammatic word-projection, avimukta,-where the Two never get apart'.

The concept holds the 'germ', of cycles after cycles of varieties of creation, some grasped, and some not-grasped; some compre- hended, some yet beyond human powers of comprehension. He who follows this path and practises it, attains the state of Jivanamukta. Liberated from a world of 'relatives', he realises the 'Absolute', and lives 'free' while still in life.

The word anandam contains the mystique of this joy, that is em- bodied in the Union of Siva and Parvati, Siva in the nominal index form lingam, and Sakti in the concept of the Ksetra, or Pitham.

The whole of Varanasi is known as Siva-ksetra, or Rudravasa; and the whole of Varanasi is also known as Gauri-pitham, the fountain- head, or the 'Source' of Sakti, the Power that 'moves' the immobile mass. The Field of the Sakti, the Field of the cosmic Power of Creation, is the Kşetra known as Gauripiṭha. (√sak-to have the power to be effective; hence Sakti: Function, Mobility, Furtherance, Energy that moves bodies immobile.)

While noting these explanations regarding the names of the wooded Anandakananam a stray thought crosses the mind. If this range of hills, inhabited by a Gana-society, had been of a pre-Vedic existence, it must have carried its original name in a language other than Sanskrit. Sanskrit could not have been a pre-Vedic language used in India.

Therefore, all these names so far called, like Varanasi, Ananda-kananam, Mahasmasanam, or Gauripiṭham, or Rudravasa are either translations, or Aryanised renditions from that forgotten language. Or are these names nothing more than poetical indulgence, or sophisticated adoptions? Even as adoptions, one or two of the names must retain the original flavour of the description. At least one of these must be still implying the original name in a forgotten language.

Two names appear to be very probable. 'Varanasi', a composite form of the two demarking streams, the Varana and the Asi, ap- pears to be the most probable one. (The absence of grammatical finesse in the word confirms the supposition.) The next one that

sounds like being 'original', though a translated form, could be Rudravasa. The last one is description of the type of people who inhabited hills and forests. These were the Rudra people.

Gauripiṭham or Anandakananam must have been later Aryan descriptive names of Tantric import. The Rudras were defined by the Vedic people as being fierce non-conformists, dedicated to anti- Vedism. Rudras in the Vedas have been traced to the Wind (Vayu) and described as terribly noisy people, always too many, and too boisterous to be controlled.

In all yajnas they were kept pacified by a share of the food (usu-upon the ally meat). The Vedic prayer implores the Rudra 'to look efforts' (of the Vedic sacrifice) with His 'pleasant face', 'the right aspect' (daksinam mukham).

Rudras were the notorious Ganas who had turned the much ac-claimed Deva-sacrifice organised by Daksa into a force and subsequently reduced it to a shambles.

We shall illustrate our point by narrating only one of the hundred legends which skilfully hid the bitterness of this strife.

The famous legend involves Siva and Sakti on one side, (i.e., the Rudra-Gana forces on one side), and Vişnu (the Vedas and the Vedic forces) on the other side.

The Puranas are full of such Siva-Visnu legends. In going through the Purana-legends one is often tempted to believe that many of these are but related versions of ancient pre-Aryan lores. Traditional tales and fables are hard to be forgotten in their entirety. Scholars believe that even Homar, Gilgamesh and Firdausi have incorporated in their creations such traditional tales from past ages.

The legend we are about to relate refers to the third of the holiest spots of Varanasi, namely, the Cakratirtha. The five great holy spots of Varanasi are: Ganga, Manikarnika, Cakratirtha, Jnanavapi, and Pancaganga, all inside Antargṛha, or Visvanathakhanda.

All the five holy spots of Varanasi have remote connections with the Rudras, and commemorate innumerable events of Rudra-Veda contests.

To illustrate the point, we take up the legends relating to (1) Cakratirtha, and (2) Manikarnika.

K. Kh. insists that the long drawn warfare between the two forces brought Lord Visnu to the fore. He at once undertook a great penance for making Siva appreciate and understand the good intentions of the new people, the Devas. Before he could enter into the state of spiritual neutrality, he required to cleanse himself through a very significant spiritual ablution.

He needed a special bath, for which he kept digging for a special source of water, until tired, he began to perspire, and the perspira- tion filled the dug out.

He had started digging with his discus at a spot close to the river Ganga. Thus came about the famed Cakratirtha, the bathing spot dug out by a discus (cakra).

The depression, 'Cakra (discus)-tirtha', the bathing pool filled with Visnu's sweat became a holy pool for all to bathe.

After his own ablution in the pool Vişnu started his penance, and so severe was this penance that in wonderment both Siva and Parvati came down to watch how the great Vişnu was

exercising him- self to please and be-friend the supreme Lord Siva.

Due to that profound and long penance the body of Visnu exuded a divine glow. It brightened up the atmosphere around, and charged it with a celestial radiation, which amazed the holy couple.

"What is that fire that glows without any fuel?", asked Siva disturbed.

As he asked, out of sheer joy of witnessing something ethereal, he started shaking his head appreciatively. And lo, the violent shake loosened a jewel from his ear-drop, which fell into the water. (All Bhairavas are enjoined to pierce their ears and adorn themselves with an earring on pain of punishment, even death.) Jewel, or mani itself is a sign of Bhairavism (cf. Hinglaj and Asapuri).

Eventually Visnu came to, and watched the disaster that had happened. Now both of them, Siva with his trident, and Visnu with his discus began to dig for 'retrieving the lost jewel', until they found it back.

The mani was found, and subsequently awarded by Visnu to Parvati as a pleasant memento. The two gods made friends through penance, and to this day Cakratirtha, a tank on the banks of the Ganga, and near Manikarnika, a special spot along the stream, are the twin holy places where all pilgrims to Varanasi perform a double ablution.

A Dattatreyatirtha stands close by. And Dattatreya is the Guardian Angel of the ancient Vamacari (contra-minded) Bhairavas.

This is just one of the many legends that commemorate the getting together of the two warring factions. Varanasi symbolises the unique compromise between differing religious trends and practices which flourished in India.

Before long we shall note that these mythological-religious-feuds provided history with materials for reconstruction of the cultural progress of a land and its People. Or, was history idealised through these appropriately conceived legends?

We shall take note of that a little later. But before we close this section we shall deal with yet another name that Varanasi has assumed, and which still sticks to her, according to Brahmanical traditions.

IV

It would be unfair to keep quiet on the Tantra import of the term mani. Mani has a very significant and sensitive, if not delicate, connotation. It is also very suggestive, biologically speaking.

Om mani padme hum' has been a significant Vajrayana chant.

For Tantra yogin-s a chant could not be meaningless. It would be worse to draw a deliberate blanket over its explanation. Words cover ideas. When an idea happens to be esoteric, the respective expressions seek symbolic shades, and suggests ideographic interpretations.

In any case an idea, howsoever abstract, has to be expressed, if human communications have to be maintained. Subjective ideas are distinctly incommunicable, but when communicated, derives the highest pleasure of expression. Of such idioms is esoteric language composed.

Mani is one such suggestive ideographic, and picturesque expression, that reserves within its tiny form a world of knowledge.

We are aware of the fact that Tantra seeks a close contact between male and female correspondents working together as partners, embracing in a close congress (asana). Students of Banabhatta, Kalidasa, Bhartṛhari, Bhavabhuti, Asvaghosa, Südraka and Kautilya are aware of Tantra's faith in amorous ecstasy as an easier means for achieving emancipation from the gross carnal worldly limbo. This, unorthodox off-the-orbit track, ended only for an adept. Yes, recommended for an adept alone.

Beware of toying with such exercises as a dilettante's inquisitive game! From times immemorial the Tantra system has been adoring the body, and more than the body, the inner urge that drives the body to seek the function of creating the many out of the one.

The drive that prompts the living world seek each other's body and procreate, comes from the Source of all drives that prompts Matter to get into activity. This drive from the Source is the Mystery- point held in absolute reverence by Tantra, sublime as a Union of lhadini and caitanya (Libido and Sublime Cosmic oneness).

In order to achieve the function of multiplying, the body, mortal as it is, becomes an important instrument. It is an instrument that confers immortality to the apparent mortal coil. It defies 'end' by its achievement in perpetuity.

Yet, because it is a body, it is subject to an easy trap known as temptation, leading to loss of discretion and control. Tantra trains the body in the difficult art of Control.

As such Tantra adores the body; and more than the body, its natural urges, none of which is regarded as either weakness, or transgression from the divine will.

Tantra rejects a negative path. Tantra seeks a partner; and this partner has to be carefully chosen: it could be a member of the opposite sex, or one with a complementary draw. This draw is called the Sex-Drive, Libido. The controlling factor is caitanya, prajna, 'a Sublimated-State of Awareness'. In Mahayana Tantra Prajnaparamita is considered a supreme deity without whose blessings 'success' is impossible.

The female partner in this context radiates a magnetic draw, and creates a magnetic field. The male partner has only a temporary function to fulfil, that of electrifying a given moment, and planting the seed.

As the receptacle of the life seed, the female body and mind has to pass through mysterious cycles of changes which evolve out of the invisible a visible form that in its turn contains life, most of which has been drawn and bestowed by the female power, which also sustains it.

This part of the female anatomy, known esoterically as 'the field', the plate, or the tablet, or a tabernacle, is termed in Tantric usage as the field, the 'Ksetra'. It receives from Tantrist usages an exclusive honour due to the sublime concept.

The honour was reserved for this 'factor' in ancient Egypt and Babylon, Japan, Tibet and China. To think, analyse and contem- plate is to recognise, accept and honour it.

The female yoni, a mundane instrument of licence, excess, vulgarising-sport and debauch, to Tantra and Tantrists is a Mother-Mandalam, the Source, the Womb; and it forms the supreme piece of veneration from which springs Life. This Life-Source, the womb; and it forms the supreme piece of veneration which all springs and fountains claim from all animals, birds, insects,-even plants. It is the life-source, the gate of knowledge, the Fountain of achievement, the source of sadhana and siddhi.

The regard that the farmer, the gardener, the botanist pays to the another-stigma-ovary combine is exactly the regard paid by Tantra to this aspect of creation's mystery.

The sublime mystic care a Tantrist bestows to his approach to this part of the female body reveals to him the fountainhead, the very source of all lives,-humans, animals, insects, and or plants.

In studying Tantra we have to keep ourselves in perfect mental readiness to receive an all important, all absorbing mystic knowledge,-nay, more than knowledge, a direct experience, indeed a message.

Without bodhi, or 'experiencing', Tantra itself is as meaningless as a painted breast could be to a hungry baby. Mere theoretical knowledge is not enough; it is not even the beginning; experience alone is the finality of all Tantra sadhana.

Considered in this light, one could realise why a Tantrist always insists on a female participant, and honours the female as an alter ego, the Mother, the very siddhi (success) he seeks.

Unprepared and undisciplined education about this area inescapably misleads. It spells ruins on the immature and the charlatan.

Tantra is not a park-ride for the curious. Tantra is not a regularised escape for the timid to seek a proxy for concubinage or prostitution. No technique of innuendo could make a 'use' of Tantra as a substitute for profligacy.

Drugs cannot induce its thrill; drinks cannot elevate its joy; promiscuity cannot assist its sublime freedom, its ethereal emancipa- tion, particularly the firm realisation of its power and control.

A sudden and unprepared exposure to this field of knowledge, particularly to the syndrome of sex, lamentably mesmerises, and damages a man's capacity for rising above his flesh, his self, and attain absolute freedom.

Yet man must remain free if he really aims at cutting through the riddle of life and death.

And in order to get free he must smash this body-trap by meeting it strong and bold, face to face like one ready to overcome the challenge of a cobra. That is Tantra.

A sudden exposure of this knowledge, or a sudden introduction to this research has been known to have unnerved beyond repairs even the strongest of minds.

Preparation, and preparation again, is the key to the entry to the mysteries.

Talk about the acceptance of the field of yoni as an object of sublime reverence, and at once tremors of suspicion and mistrust electrify the minds of the corrupt and the conservative, of the hypocrite and the wiseacre, of the timid and the weakling.

We suffer from the pressures of our Himalayan load of conceit and humbug. We love to play the smooth and the polished

upright, and yet we condemn an obvious subject because of our archaic antiquated load of prejudice.

Priggish brows are immediately raised at Tantra. They misconceive Tantra's dedication to and veneration for the mystiques of propagations, where pain and joy, creation and destruction, humiliation and glory merge together in one embrace and one annihilation. They run away from the real issues like fugitives discovered, inner shame uncovered. Their prudery and perfidy drive them to suppress wilfully their inner guilt which throttle their conscience, endanger their mental poise, and turn them into victims of hallucinations of their own making. They are afraid of their own shadows.

They virtually weave around them, cocoon-like, wreaths and wraps of their own dirty excretions, and thereby make way for their own destruction.

They, poor things, do not realise how in the process they damage their nerves irreparably.

Obsessed and tense, they fail to accept the barest of truths. A false sense of embarrassment keeps them away from thinking boldly, and making a gorgeous game of life that is all there for them to enjoy.

Instead they choose to grovel in melancholia and morbidity, and turn themselves into negativised nervous wrecks.

Why must Tantra talk about these so called taboo areas of the human anatomy? This mystic education on the esoteric functions and cultivations of Tantra spark fireflies of suspicion and disapproval, even mockery and banter. There appears to be no explanation why this should be so, except sheer stupidity and humbug.

The Nathas who maintain esoteric alter-ego-s are 'stupid humbug', the great Bauls and Sufi Sheikhs have been 'stupid humbug'; the Vaisnava functionaries have been 'stupid humbug'; the Pallavas of Nathadwara, the Dasas of Pandharpur, Kalvi, Namadeva, Tuka-rama, and a host of them have been stupid humbug frauds. Have they been so? Is this fair? Could humbugs keep captivated ethereal attention for centuries?

One wonders if stupidity and fraud could consistently claim, (1) such a lease of life; and (2) demand absolute veneration from a multitude of great thinkers as well as devotees.

Madness differs from a mystically aroused soul in this that whereas no two madmen report identical experiences, mystics of all lands and of all times converge on the same conclusions.

The beheaded Jalaluddin Rumi, or the humiliated Vallabhacharya speak in the same voice about the same joy.

Mira used to sing of her experience with the same fervour and earnestness as Vallabhacharya did, or the Great Caitanya before them.

John Blofield, translator and editor of the I-Ching (Tibetan guide to Tantric meditation) has this to say about the 'Union' symbol of Yab-Yum (Father-Mother) Union:

"There is no doubt whatsoever that the sexual symbolism in the Tantric works constitutes a hindrance to the transplanting of the Vajrayana to a Western milieu. . . . In countries where Tantras are revered, sex is seen as a wholesome function (Vallabha's idea of Puṣti and Maryada) productive of power that could be transmuted to serve lofty ends. Furthermore, as the term 'Yab-Yum' implies, representations of deities embracing are treated with profound respect (Daksina Kalika for instance); they

symbolise the forces of wisdom and compassion by analogy to a physical union which is the source of the highest bliss next to spiritual ecstasy. "Symbols are needed because spiritual ecstasy is too abstract to be movingly portrayed."1

Instances of misuses of opportunity granted could be a cause for such foolish fears. But when was medicine, or money, or power not misused? Outside of Tantra, when were women not used in and out of home for satisfaction of human lust and desire?

A hush-hush attitude about Tantra, and condemnation of Tantra practises should not gain support only because some, or even many have been wastefully, even criminally, misused for horrendious destruction of Man and his environment. Should we, or would we block and blanket scientific investigations, or their achievements reacting to this deplorable lacuna?

The purity and purpose of knowledge cannot be condemned because some quacks or monsters have been misusing what they know. The sacred heritage of knowledge granted to man has to be exercised and cultivated despite these instances of diabolic misuse.

Tantra experts themselves had been aware of the possibilities of misuse of this knowledge by quacks, frauds, opportunists and char- latans. They made it a point not to transfer the esoteric secrets with- out expert guidance, severest tests, and personal care from the adept. For the purpose of protecting these secrets from the criminal hands of the indiscreet, the yogis deliberately used in their writings a 'twilight' code language which could be deciphered only through expert and personal aid from a guru.

But a question arises, specially amongst the pragmatists and the credulous as to why Tantra maintains this hush-hush attitude, and emphasises on 'secrecy'.

If spiritual perseverance is aimed at attainment of the 'bliss of tranquil ecstasy', and a sense of universal peace, then where is the room for secrecy? Secrecy is alien to liberal idealism.

Even the Buddha was selective in transmitting his knowledge. Most of the Tantra gurus and Vajrayanis insist on secrecy.

This attitude does not spring from mystifying the rites, and attaching undue importance to the role of the guru.

Secrecy has a positive role to play in esoteric practices. Much harm could be caused by adopting an open-door policy in matters relating to esoteric Tantra knowledge.

The Vama-marga (Left-way), Short-route, or Vajrayana-way (vajra 'meaning' that which stands out against all destructions, but which cannot be resisted by any, like the irresistible force of a true dia- mond), often tempts an apprentice or novice to hasten and step up the progress. In thinking so he often deludes himself, and meets with dangerous accidents,-dangerous to his spiritual progress, men- tal health and even to his associates including the guru.

Hence the need for caution. Hence the insistence on careful selection. Hence the secrecy maintained by the guru. The secrecy is not secretive, but restrictive, as restriction in such cases is highly desirable.

"The dangers of such a course (lifting the bar of secrecy) are obvious", says John Blofield: "As one of my Lama teachers put it. 'While you were travelling in that cart, a tumble would have

done you little harm. Now I have given you an aeroplane. Don't crash in flames'!"

"The President of the London Buddhist Society records that during his visit of Peking, long before the Communist regime was established, a young novice showed him sacred pictures which for centuries had elicited reverential, sniggering over them as if they were filthy postcards."

We in our times witness painfully the degeneration of sculptural treasures of Konarka, Khajuraho, Puri, Bhubanesvara being indiscriminately photographed and put on sale for the prono-hungry sick-minded, flaunting as tourists.

Secrecy shall be required as long as treasures would need guard- ing and policing.

To continue with our discussion of the word mani, which by the way, offers one of the most eloquent illustrations of the 'twilight language' of Tantra.

Explaining mani is in itself a bold venture to break open one of these secrets, and venture into revelations meant for the adept and the devoted alone.

Mani is an esoterically pregnant word, a significant word, a sensitive and delicate word.

In the language of esoteric ideogram the use of the symbols of lotus and serpent is very common. Nations not familiar to lotus find similar symbols in rose, mushroom or hibiscus, remarkably all bor- rowed from herbal images.

This was so because they insisted on the uses of a flower symbol, which had a round ovary surrounded with pollened stamens. These flowers provided typical prototypes of the

female organ ready to receive the seed for the continuity of the life process.

The use of a flower symbol has been found, more or less, universal in the esoteric practices and literatures of the world.

A menstruating woman has been known as a female in 'blossom'. She is also called as one charged with the natural power of rajas, which symbolises magnetic power. She is at the period rajasvala, 'powered by rajas'.

The image, and the symbolic poetry involved must be regarded as a very sensitive and aesthetic appreciation of the special nature of the female in this state. The culture and tradition of Tantra bears a reverential adoration towards the female syndrome because of Life's irrepressible power stored in a female.

The symbolism permeates through the Tantric diction throughout. So tender, careful and respectful has been the choice of this diction, specially in the case of a female involvement, that at times one wonders and admires at the sublime elevated attitude that the Tantric of old had developed towards the female factor.

Besides puspavati or puspita (a girl in blossom), the menstruating female has been termed as 'the girl in season' (ṛtumati). A girl in this condition was a very special object of adoration, and in the Tantric world the regard such a girl has been a case of study and attraction for the entire Male-world towards the Female in general. (A close study of the Gipsy-world in this connection would be quite revealing.)

The Tantra phraseology has been aesthetically searching in the herbal world for blossoms which might symbolise the adorable mani, and them as special gifted and offerings. Most of the

Cacti have earned a special regard in Tantric forms of worship for this reason. Similar blossoms are: Hibiscus (Jaba); Adhateba basica (Basak); Artemesia vulgaris (Nagdona or Naga-puspa), Ochrocarpus (Punnaga), Clitoria ternatia (Aparajita), and Minusops elengi (Atasi).

In this connection one wonders if these Sanskritised names had originally been used by the basic pre-Aryan Tantra-adherents of the subcontinent. Most, or all of these blossoms, have curative herbal values, and were and still are in popular use amongst the aboriginal societies. These must have their country names which have now been relegated back, as the entire aboriginal society has been pushed back. The forces of usurpation have many coloured methods to impose their superiority over the victims they subjugate.

(The careful reader could interpret many of the Latin names of these flowers in terms of highly charged sex-adoration.)

Even Rabindranath Tagore, sensitive, aesthetic, and delicately reserved as he and his poetry have been, in a most suggestive, emotive song has used this lotus-symbol to the best advantage for de- scribing the first approach of two lovers to discover one another intimately and physically, and functionise the ultimate purpose, or the Great Design of the Creative Phenomenon. That design is for propagating the unending cycles of the Miracle known as Life. It is called Divine because of the underlying creative purpose and the Mystery veiling that purpose.

The entire song throbs and thrills with a silent sensuous climax of the 'meet'. In doing so the great poet uses expressions symbolised by the lotus and the stamens complete with the ovum-head.

In Tagore's poem the lotus of union vibrates with eager excitement for the mystery of an imminent adventure. The anatomy of the flower with its stamen, thalamus and philamen has found ex- pression in a sensitively tender and vivid language that elevates the subject, and etherealises the theme. All he meant, and desired to mean, is the function of a union wrapped within the heavenly couch of Love, when two souls feel eager to effect a congress through the instrument of the body's ardour.

True poetical sensitiveness has always found this area of mystery a delectable piece for the pen. No poet has ever spared himself while describing this aspect of a human union. Off hand I am re- minded of Kalidasa, Asvaghosa, Mammata, Amaru, Bhartṛhari, Ovid, Dante, Virgil, Sappho, Shakespeare, Goethe and a host of Persian and Arabic poets, like Hafiz, Sadi, Jalaluddin Rumi, Khusro, Ghalib, Iqbal, and Firaq.

V.S. Apte, in his celebrated Practical Sanskrit-English Dictionary states mani to be 'clitoris'.

The symbolism of lotus has been profusely used in the literature of yoga, specially in relation to the Kundalini yoga, which speaks of the six lotuses, and of the mystic lotus with a thousand petals. (A petal in this context denotes the million sensuous spots around the central area which holds the ovarian pocket.)

Awakening of the 'Sleeping Serpent', or the gradual unfolding of the many petals indicate the gradual attainment of that supra-conscious 'thrill' associated with what the great Tantric Abhinava- gupta calls 'Spanda'.

In designing the very many Yantras Indian Tantra adepts (as of the Tibetan school) have used the lotus as an ultimate 'home'

which all yogins 'have to' reach. The floral goal is invariably encircled with sensitive stamens, and held by a thalamus at the centre.

Later on when image-makers were busy in giving form to the different yogic concepts, and which still find expression in the celebrated (and often foolishly condemned) image of the Hindu system of yoga, the deities and their counterparts are found mostly seated on lotuses. Brahma, the Creator, and Siva, the Absorber both have been imaged on lotuses. Visnu, the sustainer holds in his hand a lotus, and has for his alter-ego a Lotus-girl.

The copulated male-female syndrome finds its best expression on the image of the lotus, with the ovarian thalamus encircled by the sensitive and fertile stamens.

Tantric mani, is the clitoris; and the mani-padma means the mani securedly preserved between the labias. Mani and karnika together means, in Tantric esoteric symbolism, the sensitive clitoris, held within the petals of the labias, and covered with hairs as is the flower's ovary covered with the stamens.

Therefore, Manikarnika, the holy bathing place, has to be regarded as the place of union of the two forces of the tribal Rudra and the Vedic Vişnu. It is in Manikarnika that the Rudra-Sakti, or the Vama-Tantra-way, held dear by the Bhrgus (Fire-worshippers, such as Parasurama, Jamadagni, Sambarta, Markandeya, Dattatreya, Utathya, Bhartṛhari) won over the acceptance of the Vedic Visnu. The cakra (discus) and the trisula (trident) together consecrated Cakratirtha in order to end all feuds for all times.

After Manikarnika, we propose to deal with Mahasmasana, yet an- other name for Varanasi. This we have discussed before in connec- tion with the names of Varanasi. Here we propose to discuss this name in historical and esoteric details.

Smasana we know, is a cremation ground. We also should bear in mind that the Hindu society maintained its crematory grounds meticulously far away from villages and habitations. It was a simple device to fight pollution.

This is yet another significant indication that our Varanasi, the Anandakananam, must have been situated quite away from and outside the historical city of Kasi-Varanasi, which had been a bone of political contention between different royal houses with different religious leanings, and more importantly, which had found favour with Gautama Buddha, and the Jataka tales.

Kasi still abides by a faith that all of Varanasi between the Varana and the Asi is a crematory ground. Death within its boundaries is a guarantee for liberation even without, or deprived of the extreme unction, or any last ceremonial function. Cremation itself may be considered unnecessary. All this due to the natural holiness of the soil.

This important implication of Mahasmasana is supposed to be true of all lives, not humans alone.

Sma means a corpse; and sana means sayana, 'to sleep', (for ever).

The whole of Varanasi thus serves as a great 'bed' for the last rest of all bodies, cremated or not cremated.

And when the final dissolution of Creation comes, all the corpses which found rest in Mahasmasana would receive the

benedictions of final liberation (of Judaic/Christian concept of Resurrection).

There are two beliefs popular amongst the people of Varanasi.

One is this guarantee of liberation. Once the last breath of life stops, and the mortal body is left on the dusts of Varanasi, the vital breath reaches its Source.

There is another belief amongst the local people. They hold it as a faith that the least pebble found on the paths of Varanasi is but a lingam (the accepted symbol) of the great Lord of the Universe, Visvesvara (Kasi ke kankar, sab hi Sankara). So one, by choosing to live in Varanasi, has actually chosen to live closest to 'Siva-ta', or the State of Siva.

Although the whole place was good enough for the final rest of mortals, the actual cremation ground of Varanasi was situated at the southernmost corner of the bank of the river, in Kedarakhanda; i.e., away from the populated Varana banks. Between what is now known as the fort of Raja Chet Singh, and Kedara ghat, lies this ancient crematory site. It is known as Hariscandra Smasana, where the mythological king of Ayodhya had served as a crematory under- taker for years, and left his mark on the identity of the Smasana. (This popular belief does not however stand the test of history. Of that later on.)

Today, however, the Manikarnika smasana appears to be more popular.

VI

Speaking historically Manikarnika's use as a cremation-ground has been of recent origin. The neighbourhood of the holy

Cakratirtha, Brahmanala and the Manikarnika tirtha could not have been used for funerary purposes. Neither K. Kh. nor K. Mhtm. mentions this. In those chronicles both Manikarnika and Cakratirtha are holy 'bath- ing' places.

Moreover, the central situation of the bank should have precluded on hygienic and aesthetic grounds its being used for the burning of dead bodies. The three monuments above noted had been of mo- mentous importance to all the devotees, and would not be used as crematory ground without some historic compulsions.

The traditional funeral ground of ancient Varanasi was ideally situated to the south of the three hills of Anandakananam. It used to be the Hariscandra ghat lying between the Asi and the Kedara hills.

The present Manikarnika burning ghat had been originally known as Rajaballabha ghat, and the neighbouring bathing ghat was known as the Jalesvara ghat. Nearby stands the Dattatreya ghat with the Dattatreya temple close by.

So when due to historical compulsions a search for an alternative site for funeral rites was made, the out-of-the-way 'Rudra-section' was preferred. It was not at all congested in those days; and certainly it was not considered to have been 'the centre of the city'. The pre-eleventh century 'city of Varanasi' was spread as we know, along the Varana and moved upto the Pancaganga hills.

Why was a funeral ground allowed at this part of the city? Thereby hangs a tale.

For that we have to search history.

In a painting of the Manikarnika ghat by an Englishman (Lt. Col. Forest, 1824) the environs have been vividly described. The three temples in the background, along with the two leaning tem- ples (known as Jalesvara temple) half merged in the river, have been clearly depicted. We find no trace of any human habitation in the picture. On the contrary we find the banks covered with a welcome wooded mantle. There is no trace of the present overhanging bluffs now meant for crematory exercises.

The place certainly was not being used for cremation at that point of time. The crematory ground with its tower of peace and resting pavilion are of quite recent origin.

In 1760 the mother of one Lala Kashmirilal, treasurer of Nawab Safdar Jung of Oudh, died. The body was carried to the usual Hariscandra ghat. But the undertaker's tyranny over the funerary charges fully exposed the extremity of the situation. In protest the powerful civil servant abandoned the site, and thought of establish- ing a new location free from this tyranny suffered by all and sundry.

The new site, close to Jalesvara ghat, known as Rajavallabha ghat, was selected because of its proximity to the holy grounds of Brahmanala. It was the holiest of the holy spots along the river in Varanasi. Moreover it was close to the foothills of the Visvesvara hill.

Kashmirilal's mother was given a grand funeral at the holiest of holy grounds in Varanasi. From the time of the cremation of the mother of Kashmirilal (1760) Manikarnika, situated near Cakra- tirtha, and Brahmanala gradually became accepted as

the more sacred ground for funerals, and certainly more acceptable to the 'elevated' in the social order.

It also ended, eventually, the monopolist tyranny of undertakers of Hariscandra ghat.

We have noted the fact that traditionally the whole of the

Avimuktakşetra of Varanasi (specially the Visvesvarakhanda) was regarded as a Mahasmasana, or funeral ground.

This in itself shows that the Varanasi hills, where woods alone prevailed, particularly the banks, were not favoured by household- ers for settlement.

This supports again the saying that "in Varanasi no householders. ever lived". The hills were exclusively used by the Ganas, non-Aryan followers of Bhutanatha, Kalabhairava and Ganapati. These were feuds the sects whose fierce anti-Vedic stance had provoked so many between Kasi-Kosala and the Gahadavalas of Kanauj. After peace had been eventually struck, sages and seers, teachers and their disciples began to crowd the wooded hills.

It must be borne in mind, however, that throughout this process

of shifting the funeral grounds from Hariscandra ghat to Manikarnika, the actual city of Varanasi was spread along both the banks of the Varana, and over the contiguous lands. The city, charged by periodical attacks from the Kosalas continued shifting to the south, but contained the extensions within the Visvanathakhanda. The reputed markets of Varanasi, and its 'Pakki-Mahal' (orthodox traditional quarters) were located within this area.

This extension forced elimination of two more funeral grounds, which had naturally grown up along what had been regarded as the 'outskirts' of the growing city.

One of these funeral grounds was situated near the Varana confluence, and the other near the Dattatreya ghats.

The extension of the city eliminated these funeral grounds, and Manikarnika stands as the sole accidental funeral ground placed right on the face of the crowded city as a symbol of official authority defying hygienic claims, but eliminating tax-tyranny.

It would not be wrong to infer that the battle of Varanasi was waged between two opposing ideologies; the free socially casteless forces of the Ganas, Bhūtas, Yaksas and Pisacas on the one side, and the Vedic Aryanised class-conscious colonisers on the other.

It is interesting to note that the principal two deities of Varanasi are (1) Siva Visvesvara, the Primal Male in the linga form, and (2) Bhavani Annapurna, the Primal Source-power, the Lhadini, Visalaksi, Visala or, Lalita represents that female presence. Some consider Bhavani-Annapurna to be the alter-ego of Visvanatha. But this is more or less an accepted hearsay.

The battle for Varanasi was indeed a battle for survival of the ancient against the modern; of indigenous forms of living, and devotion, against imposition of casteism and sacrificial fires. To dispose of all this as a historical episode, as a struggle for politico-economic expansionism and ascendancy of vested interest would be misleading.

The Yayati-s of Kasi (Pratardana-Divodasa & Co.) were champions of Vedic supremacy. They were referred to in the

Epics and the Puranas as followers of Visnu. They made consistent and indiscriminate efforts to occupy the Rudravasa Anandakananam on the Varanasi hills, and change the popular Bhairava way of life of the Rudriyas. This provoked other pro-Rudra forces. These were the 'not-so-Aryan' Haihayas, and the foreign Ksarata-Pahlava clans. There were also the famous Rasṭrakūtas, acknowledged Rudra worshippers, who stood in martial defence of the status of Varanasi (K. Kh.)

Historians relate both the Haihayas and the Rasṭrakūtas to nonIndian immigrants such as the Ksaratas, or the Ksatrapas (Satraps), who formed a branch of the Rastrakūtas.

The Puranas support this view.

The sudden rise of these powers, after the repulsion of the Hunamenace by Yasovardhana Deva diverts our attention to these horse riding races of Central Asia lurking across the Indian borders.

After the defeat of the Huna-s, most of their followers decided to settle in India and try their luck. Their inseparableness from their horses could have prompted the Purana writers to describe them as 'born of horses' (The interested may find further materials from legends in the Devi Bhagavatam about Ekavira, and the legend of Dandi and Asvini in the Danḍiparvam of the Khila Mahabharata.

(Legends of Asva, Asvini, Hayagriva, are found cropping up around the time.)

Names such as Ksatrapas/Ksaratas sound un-Sanskrit, as do Naha- pana, Casṭana, etc. A change of names from such un-Sanskrit sounds to such Sanskritised ones as Jayadamana,

Rudradamana and Satava- hana show how immigrants took roots in the Indian soil with a spirit of total identity.

It explains their military vision to come to the aid of Varanasi against continuous efforts of occupational zeal led, by Divodasa, Pratardana, and later by the Gahadavalas of Kanauj. Varanasi's style of living as well as its commercial power held for them a great temptation.

History regards these feuds in the conventional light of political upshots. But even political upshots have to some excuses for play- ing a risky role in meddling with bloody feuds. There is always a social logic acting behind prolonged wars of attrition.

In this connection one is reminded of the Vedic legend of Vivasvan (Sun) and Sanjna, as of Tvasta and Asvini.

Folk-songs, names of non-Vedic origin, and a number of ritualistic norms indicate definite inroads of non-Aryan norms into the Aryan community. The worship of Ganapati and of the Sun-God point out to yet another new trend.

The battle for Varanasi was ideologically given by the sons of the soil.

7

Varanasi Ruins

I

The mode of the social changes we are discussing was not gradual as social changes normally are supposed to be. These changes un- fortunately were stamped by shock responses to human greed and lust, and the brute desire to dominate.

If we carry our investigation into the subtler aspects of this social change, with the help of a map of the central locality, generally noted as the "Chowk-area", we shall be benefited by more revelations of facts which would go in support of the observations made above.

At the moment our investigation may be confined to the area surrounded by the lane running from 'Dhunḍiraja-Ganesa' to the north of the present Visvesvara temple, and join the Tripura Bhairavi- Kacaurigali lane which runs north-south parallel to the river. From the junction we proceed direct north, until we meet the gate to our left, which we pass through, and approach the city-Kotwali (police headquarters) and continue west across the chowk junction.

We continue our progress westwards through the Dalmanḍi lane until we reach the Station Road proceeding past the Baniabag formerly Beni (in the map of James Prinsep, 1822), a vast lake. From the junction we turn south and reach the Anglican church near Godhowlia crossing. From Godhowlia we proceed east until we reach the Visvanatha lane and Dasaswamedha junction (Dersi ka Pul).

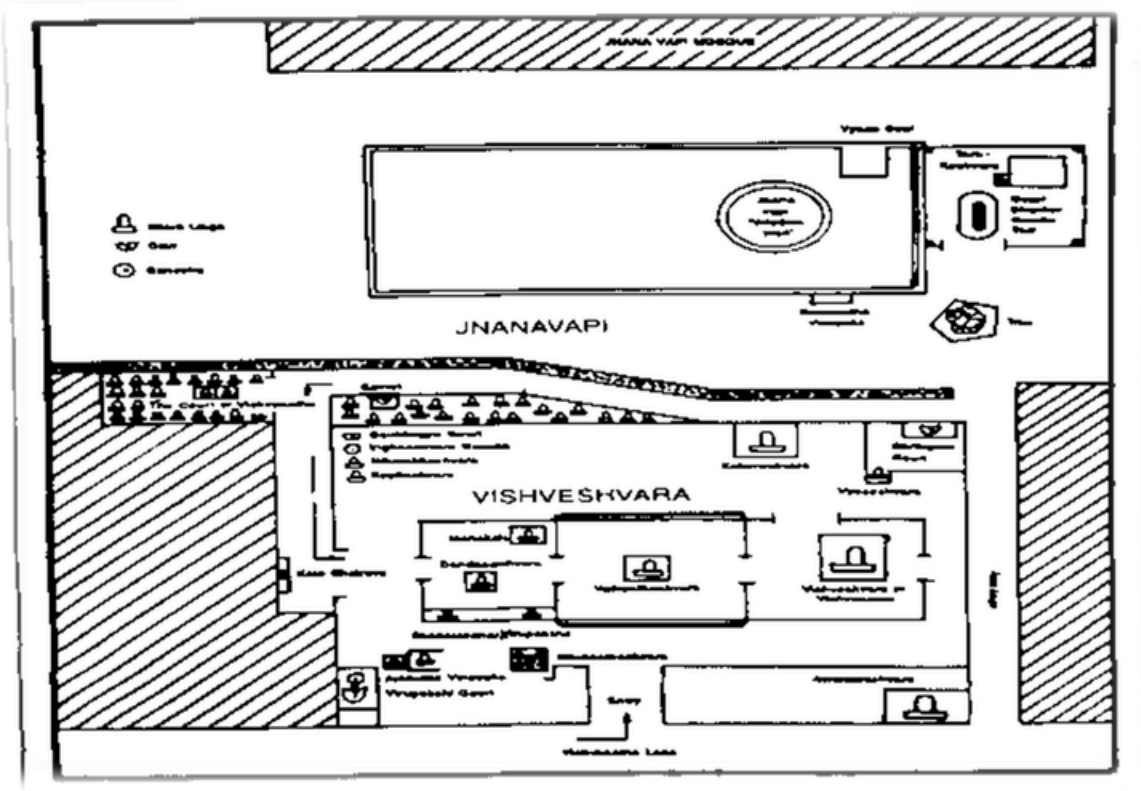
The square so described could be regarded as the heart throb of the city of Varanasi described as Visvanathakhanḍa or Antargṛha.

With the present temple as the central point we move north, and find the wide area of the Jnanavapi, the Tank of Knowledge.

Chapter 33 of Kasikhanḍam records the following legend regard- ing Jnanavapi.

'Isana', the Rudra, (finding the place congenial) took up his famous trident, and dug with it a great pond, and then with its

water bathed the universe in its linga form. Thousands upon thou- sands of jars of water were used for bathing the lingam. This pleased Rudra, and he desired to bless the place. He announced that the word Siva (wherein all find Rest), in fact means Sublime Realisation. The state of attainment of this realisation has been materialised in the form of water with which this great tank has been filled. Hence this pond with its water shall be known as Jnana-dã, or Jnana-vapi.



Map 7. Jnanavapi and the temples

Chapter 34 of the same Purana refers to "the two Gana followers of Rudra-Siva, Subhrama (a confused but good soul) and Vibhrama (a confused, as well as a contrary soul). They kept guard at Siva's abode. Dandanayaka, or Dandapani was yet another special guard, who was all the time in-charge of the

sanctity of this water from forces which are determined to pollute its spiritual power....

"When the scriptures, refer to water as one of the eight material forms of Siva, particularly this very collection of water is signified." (Which would mean that the water of the tank was as good as Siva in form. A bath in this water means absolute ablution.)

We are hardly concerned here with the scriptural instructions, or its metaphysical significance.

But certainly we would like to take note of such chronicles for our guidance.

Contemporary writings reflect the social norms of their time.

The area of Jnanavapi, as it exists today, shall prove to us of great benefit. We have much to gain by keeping close to this landmark, and by verifying these with the recordings of the Purana-s. For rediscovering Varanasi the most salient points in the map
are (a) the Varana in the south, (b) the Macchodari channel and Bisesvarganj Market, (c) Mandakinitalab, or lake, (d) Jnanavapi and the Visvanatha hill, particularly the last two.

Traditional beliefs regarding the ancient layout have also to be investigated, interpreted for acceptable conclusions.

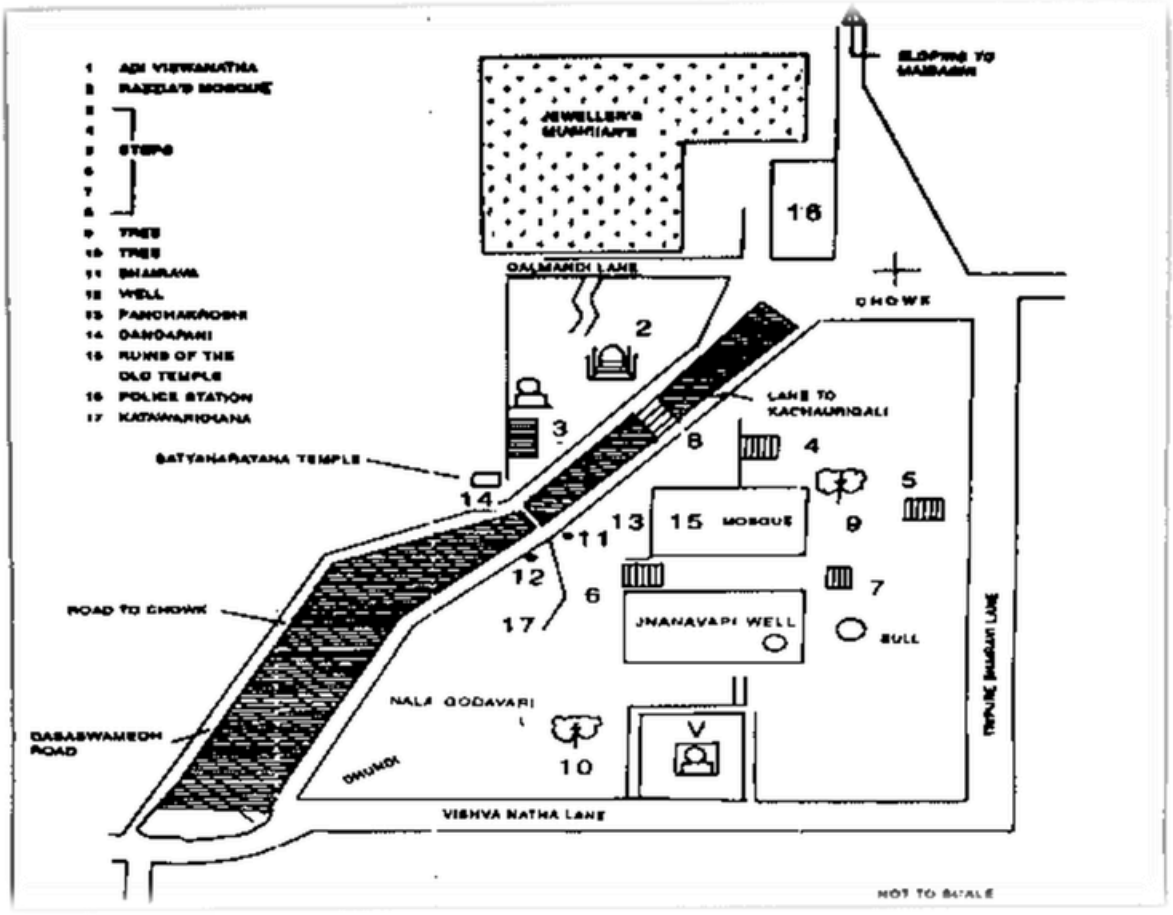
In course of time, with the many acts of vandalism, the original locale of the famous temple could have become a matter of conjecture. But in fact it is not. The existence of a large tank, and its actual position could not be totally disputed, particularly in the face of the stark evidence of a spot even now regarded,

preserved and worshipped as a reminding monument of the filled up tank, Jnanavapi.

Jaanavapi is gone. Jnanavapi still exists. The tank has been filled. But water is still sprinkled from a well.

Therefore, we shall take advantage of what we have as solid forms of evidence. Of this the entire area known as Jnanavapi provides us with a number of clues.

Around and close to the Jnanavapi there exists to this day a series of flights of steps. Let us have a look at the map. Of the eight



Maps 8. Chowk area-old and new temples

sets of steps shown on the map all except the eighth one actually surround the place known as the ancient Jnanavapi, the

scriptural water tank. Today nothing but a dismal well exists, and pious pilgrims satisfy their zeal by receiving from the priest a few drops sprinkled on their head, or given to them for a purifying sip.

The credulous faithful also listen solemnly to yet another story related by priests that when the great temple had actually been reduced to devastation, the great lingam "in order to save its sanctity from the touch of the Yavanas, jumped into the well". The question remains, however, that he who cannot save his own sanctity except by hiding into a well, or pool of water, could hardly be relied upon as a saviour from spiritual transgressions.

The moral implications could be questioned, but not the historical message involved.

We learn from this legend that the actual lingam of the temple which existed near the present Jnanavapi did not have to suffer any indignities, for a simple reason. The lingam was not there. To the chagrin of the fanatics it had been replaced by a replica.

So we shall indulge ourselves in interpreting the priest's tale.

The fact appears to be as follows. The lingam had been removed to a safer hiding place. The popular lore was an effective and well guarded cover to keep the real lingam out of the reach of vandals. It is good to bear in mind that we are not discussing about the
image installed in the great Moksa Laksmi-vilasa temple referred to by Hiüen Tsang. That one, as we know, was made of copper, and must have been too heavy to move, or even to hide.

In any case that one was looted, and lost for ever. Here we are concerned with the lingam, and the temple. It had been installed in a newly built edifice erected on the eastern side of the great tank, but at a much lower level than the original site atop the hill to the west.

The construction was possible through the intervention of the liberal emperor Akbar, when in consideration of Hindu sentiments he announced a general sanction for reconstructing the Hindu temples in the principal cities of north India (Kasi, Prayag and Mathura).

In course of time these had been brought down by the fanatcism of his great grandson Aurangzeb, who was responsible for the final dismemberment of the mighty-Mughal Empire (1658-1707).

The temple was devastated. The holy tank became a receptacle of the dirty debris of the township, and got eventually filled up.

But the lingam itself had hid behind a legend that the venerable deity had taken a jump into the well nearby to 'save' itself from the ignominy of defilement.

Anyway the lingam was missing, but for a replica.

Of that later on.

What mattered most was the preservation of an idea, which held on. The case of the Gujarat temple of Somnath set an example to point. Repeated destructions of the temple and the deity could not dampen the spirit of the devotees, who raised the temple again and again, defying all physical molestations. The material stone content of the image mattered very little as long as the spiritual content kept alive.

It is remarkable that in spite of the spiritual stigma of blind idola- try, to the Hindus the actual mass of stone or metal did not matter much. The persistence of the spirit they had displayed in preserv- ing their cultural faith continued to sustain them, and enabled them to overcome the high seas of historical upheavals. The journey has been too long. In fact it has been a journey of 5000 years, or more.

After the Imperial sanction was obtained from Akbar, Pandit Narayana Dutt (1514-95) consecrated a new lingam in the new temple. In doing so he quoted scriptural support, and pronounced to the applauding Hindus that an actual 'place' of worship retains its holiness, and man-made structures did not have to carry any special inviolable sanctity.' Objective symbolic deities, like a lingam, or an image, are but perceptible bubbles on the cosmic ocean of Time, coming up only to be dissolved. A holy place is holy because of the spiritual aura left by centuries of prayers lifted by billions of devotees.

The deities could be violated and changed, but not the grounds rendered holy by piety, devotion and sacrifice.

We have already referred to the lost lingam hidden at the humble residence of a devotee living in the locality of Bhadauni near Asi-Lolarka area of Varanasi. The claim is understandably accepted and honoured by the acknowledgeable.

We are, however, tempted to believe that for the sake of afford- ing an acceptable cover for the courageous Brahmin, who had staked his life for saving the lingam, the legend of the 'jump in the well' was created and maintained as a shield through time.

For the fanatics Aurangzeb had accomplished a good job. He had destroyed the Visvanatha temple, defiled the Jnanavapi

tank, desecrated the Pancaganga site, brought down the great Bindu- madhava temple, and destroyed the series of ancient temples along the Varana, such as Adikesava, Omkaresvara, Avimuktesvara, Krtti- vasesvara, Madhyamesvara, and stopped only with constructing mosques on the same sites as if in defiance of the ruling of Pandit Narayana Dutt.

The crystal clear waters of the Macchodari were defiled, and what used to be the magnificent Barkarikunda with its numerous temples was reduced to a wilderness.

In doing so he had destroyed the entire series of the golden towers that had attracted and bemused the wonder stricken eyes of the Chinese savant Hiüen Tsang as he had stood on the northern ap- proaches to the Varana and viewed the expansive panorama of the famed city.

That sanctified area stands today in a shambles occupied by a crowd of commercial houses divided by lanes and sublanes where thousands humbly, silently, patiently ply their livelihood, and pine over the sad holocaust that has not been forgotten over the centuries.

With that kind of unthinking act, prompted through sheer bigotry, if not he, the later Mughals came to lose an empire that was the envy of the world.

That was the last historically recorded violation of the temples of Varanasi. In any case Aurangzeb could not have destroyed the Moksa Laksmi-vilasa temple referred to by Hiüen Tsang, and situated atop the chowk-hill.

The Ghories had accomplished that act (1206-10).

That temple was situated on the peak of the highest hill lying to the east of the ancient Jnanavapi. The waters reached almost the foot of the hills (still marked by a sharp and deep gradient indented by several series of flights of steps protected by a retaining wall which forms the south-western limit of Dandapani Lane.

The mass of wealth of the temple for which it was sacked was carried away, along with the copper deity. But the place was left abandoned for a long time. Devotees continued prayers on an adjacent hill.

The lingam gone, the black-stone Gauripattam (with probably a new lingam) is still being worshipped. The new site on a hill is still situated behind the Satyanarayana shrine. It still enjoys the glory of having for its use the original black Gauripattam, removed from the adjacent hill.

The actual site of the Moksa Laksmi-vilasa temple has since been occupied by 'Raziyya Begum's Mosque'.

It appears that the original Moksa Laksmi-vilasa seen by Hiüen Tsang, and which had an 'image' form of Siva, was destroyed in 1194. When reconstructed, a stone lingam with a huge black stone Gauripattam was installed in place of an image. That new temple too suffered destruction at the time of the Tughlaqs (1351-58).

II

How many times altogether was the Visvanatha temple in Varanasi destroyed?

To our best knowledge five times.

1. The Pathan Ghories (of the Slave dynasty):

Qutbuddin Aibak destroyed the temple for the first time in 1194.

2. The Khaljis do not appear to have molested Varanasi. Most of the northern temples having been ransacked, for a change they concentrated on sacking the rich temples of the Deccan. It was probably during this interim respite that the lingam ease to occupy the abandoned hill at Varanasi. Iltutmish (1210- 36) a dedicated Sufi, occupying the Delhi throne, did not bother himself with destructive pursuits. The second sack of the new temple was completed under the efforts of the Shirqui-s of Jaunpur (1390-1475), and a mosque was con- structed on the site. But of this later on.

Thereafter, upto 1457 no history of the temple is available.

Devotion must have continued on the adjacent hill.

3. Under the Tughlaqs Varanasi again suffered. Firoz Shah Tughlaq sacked the new temple on the adjacent hill (1351).

4. The Lodhis (1451-1526): Sikandar Lodhi destroyed the temple rebuilt on the demolished site on the hill. No temple was allowed to be built on the site thereafter.

5. The Mughals: Finally the site was changed when Akbar sanctioned reconstruction. The new temple on the Jnanavapi site was destroyed by Aurangzeb 1679.

[This was probably the lingam that started the legend of the jump in the well when it was actually secreted away.]

Of the Islamic dynasties who ruled Delhi almost all had tried their hands on loot through temple sacking.

The Khalji-s, who appear to have spared Varanasi, when no big temple was kept standing any way, were indeed hungry temple

sackers. The reason for such determined onslaught against Hindu temples was very simple. Sacking of temple meant money. Vast treasures tempted the rulers who had to maintain a vast army, and keep it satisfied by most irregular payments. The economic pattern of the raiding monarchs, and specially the system they followed in maintaining the royal army and retainers, depended on the for- mula of 'raid and loot'. The system of a salaried standing army was not in vogue at the time.

They did not pay a salary even to the high placed generals. Most of the officers were kept satisfied by offer of ranks, and lands, called 'jagirs'. Such jagirs could not be transferred, sold or handed down as a legacy from father to son. That favour was dependant on the pleasures of the monarch.

In a situation like this soldiers had to be kept satisfied with shares from plunder. And no other target tempted the ruling monarchs so much as the wealth amassed over generations in the famous temples of Hindustan. The temples of the Hindus offered cool targets for any aggrandiser. Religion appears to have been an excuse which provided enough cover to the looters to arouse mass euphoria against infidels.

This is the reason why historical investigations became suspicious about the religious motives of the plunderers. Every temple offered easy temptation to the freebooters. Any time the disgruntling com- plaints of the unpaid army became too risky, a rage of religious bigotry was instigated, and expeditions against the helpless were organised. The disgruntled army would be pacified by just roping in a dozen or so helpless temples.

That was the go of those horrible times.

[The menace of the murderous Thugees in the period between Ahmed Shah Abdali's sack of Delhi and Lord William Bentinck could be traced to this predatory system of loot and pay, or, loot and share.]

The Khaljis did not destroy many temples of the north because there were no more prominent temples in the north to be plundered.

The great Buddhist centres of Puruṣapura (Peshawar), and the great temples of Varahamüla (Baramūla), and Multan, the numerous rich temples of Kashmir, Rajasthan, and Saurastra, inclusive of the great Somnath, the fabulous Sun-temple of King Anangapal of Indraprastha (Delhi), and the temples of Varanasi, Mathura, Ayodhya, Gaya, Khajuraho, Puri and Bhubanesvara, all having disappeared, there was practically nothing left in the north.

The north having been denuded, the looters felt attracted to the south.

The south was the target. The south had great temples maintained by the great Hindu monarchs. Calukyas, Colas, Pandyas, Hoysalas, Rasṭrakūtas, Satavahanas, Kakatiyas, Pahlavas, Kalacuris all were great temple builders. Through such efforts the kings not only kept economy moving, but also protected art, artists, learning and education. The massive wealth of those temples tickled the cupidity of the hungry demands of those monarchs, who, by hook or crook, had to keep their hosts satisfied. Hence the ritual of plun- dering the temples in the name of religion. No religion advocates loot, plunder, rape and cruelty. Least so Islam.

A study of the history of temple destruction from the times of Ninevah, Ur, Persepolis, Babylon, Medina, Mecca, Cairo, Dardanelis to the days of Puruşapura, Mülasthana, Varahamihira, Vaikuntha, Martanḍa, Chinnakesava, Vijayeśvara (Kashmir), and Varanasi the sordid tale has remained the same. Temple devastations fed the religious fire, and supplied wealth to an exchequer which never knew how to manage the finances of the subcontinent of India.

This, and no other, was the real reason why the eyes of the Khaljis suddenly were turned to the south, when the north, more or less, was left alone.

In fact a shattered Varanasi was left alone for over 150 years. For 150 years an uncanny calm of the graveyard and Mahasmasana settled on the old town along the Varana while the new town waited for a resurrection.

This programme of plundering the rich shrines and eroding the sentiments of the Hindus received welcome respite at three different periods. These referred to the reigns of (1) Iltutmish-Balban (1266-87); (2) Emperor Akbar the Great (1556-1605); and (3) Emperor Shah Alam (1772).

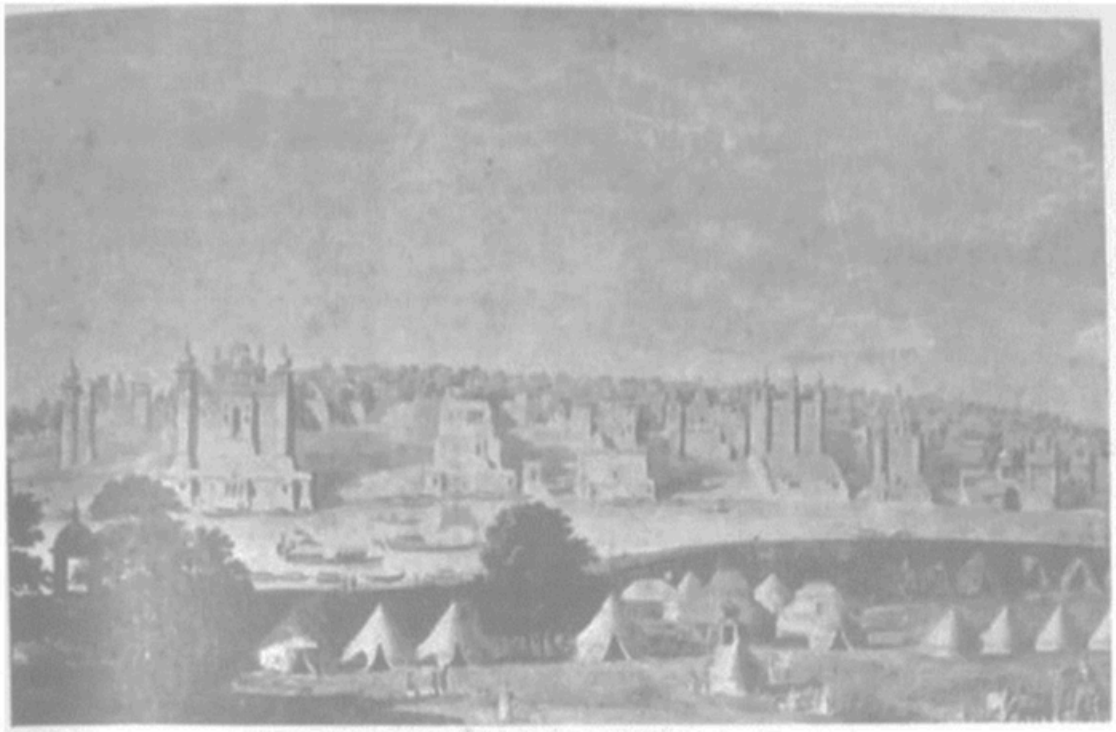
These periods of welcome respite from devastations did not come from accident, or policy. The reasons lay deeper.

The Khaljis had been ravaging the south. They were already so gorged that they could not do any better than call a halt for the time being. An attack on Varanasi or Mathura would be as profit- able as attacking an empty egg-shall.

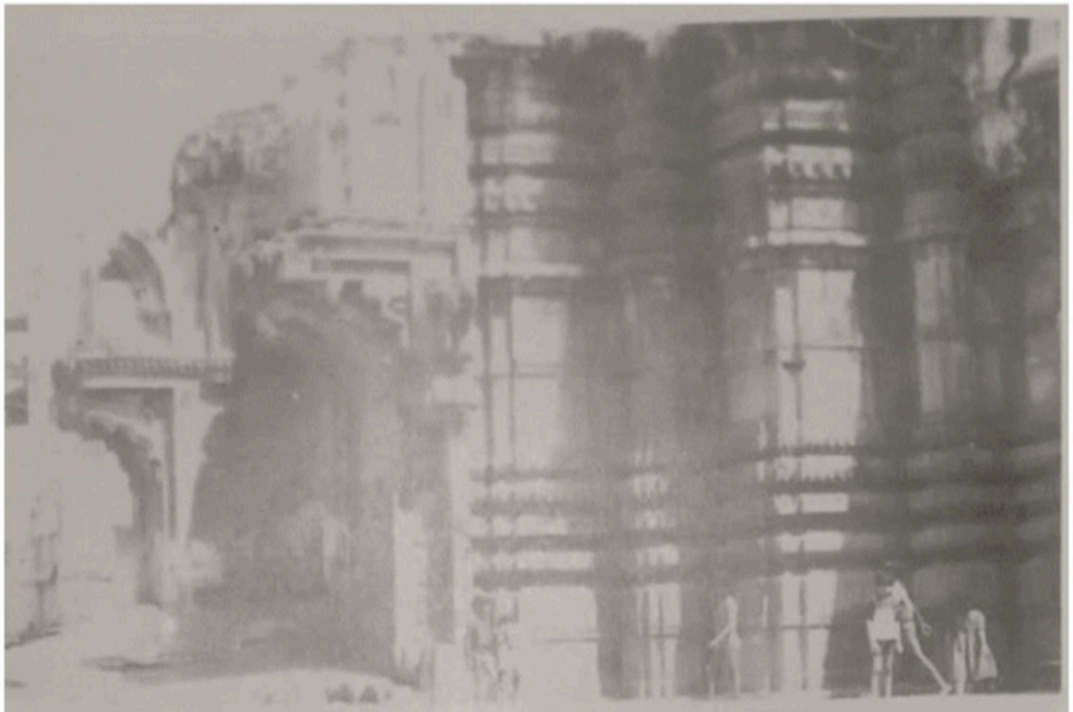
Moreover Balban was a sedate and wise ruler. He had appreciated the necessity of keeping on good terms with the majority of his subjects. It is more than likely that he had fully

considered the good effects of maintaining peace with the generally wealthy commercial Hindus.

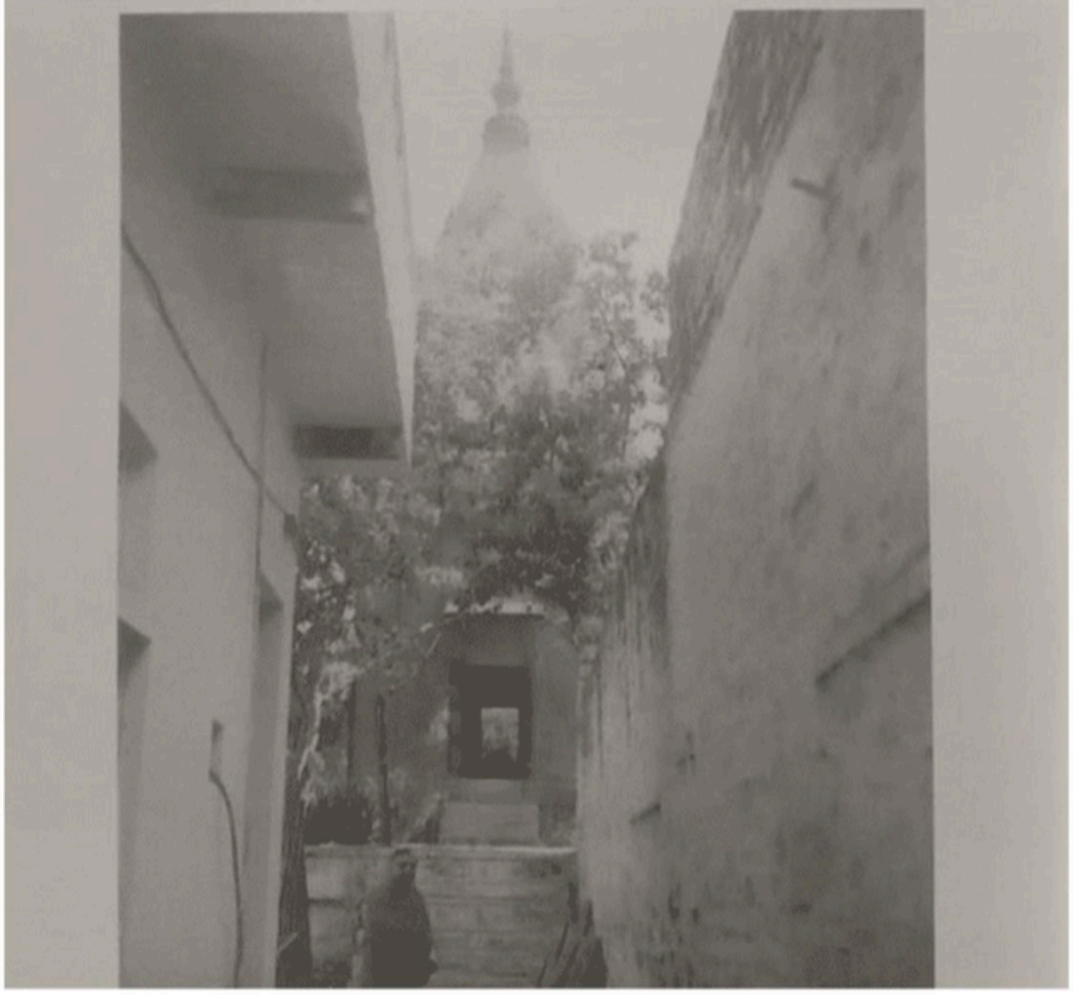
In fact he ignored the information that in Varanasi, as in other

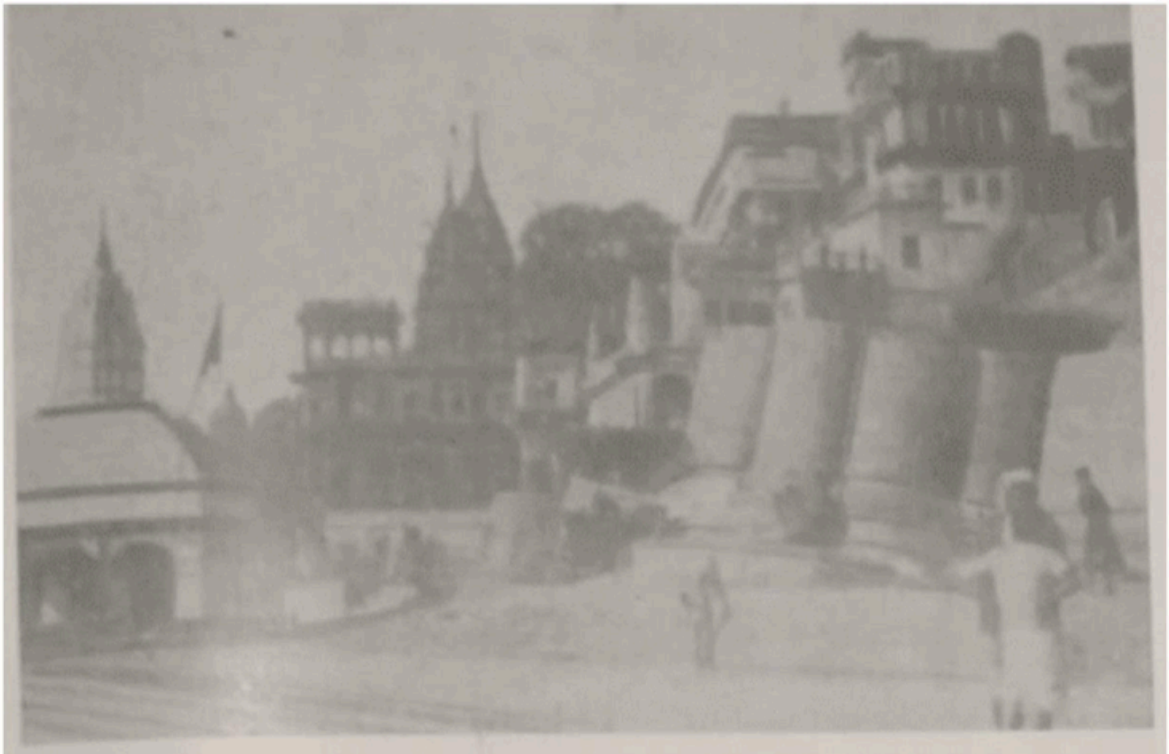


Ill. 1. (*above*) Varanasi seen from the eastern bank drawn by an unknown soldier at the end of Islamic rule, original painting at Victoria Memorial Museum, Calcutta.
Ill. 2. (*below*) The view of the Gaṅgā in Varanasi from Chauki ghat or Nāga ghat.



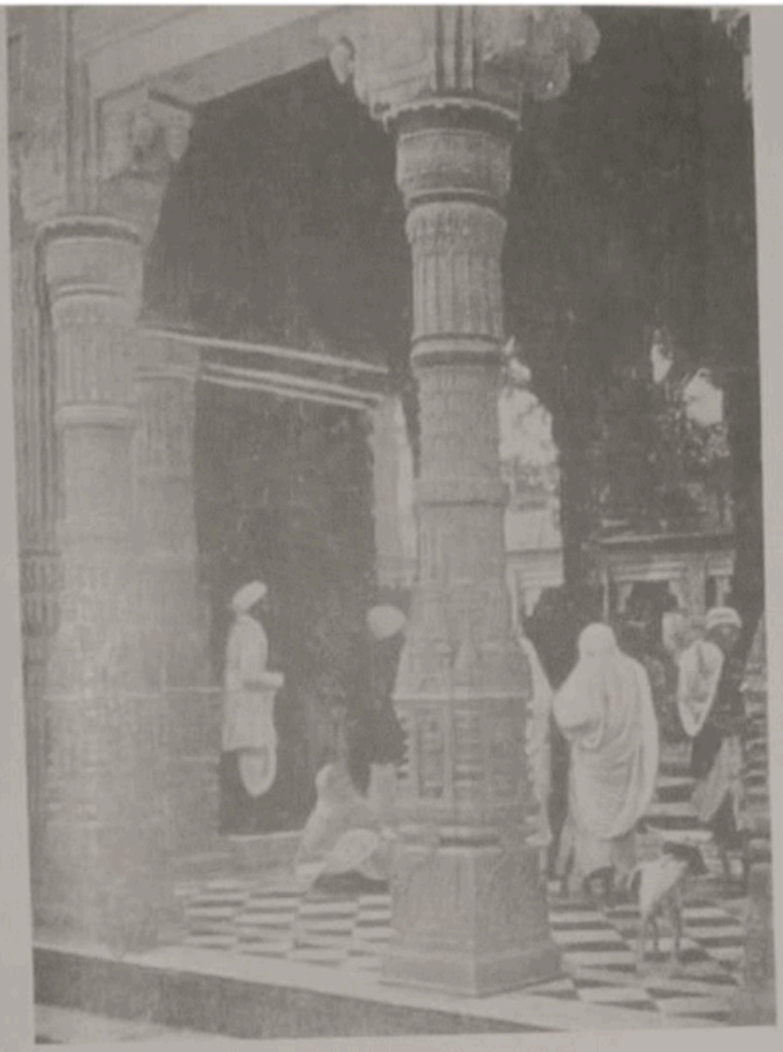
Ill. 3. (*above*) The ruin of old Viśvanātha temple, back of the mosque at Jñānavāpī.
Ill. 4. (*below*) Kṛttivāseśvara temple, as today.



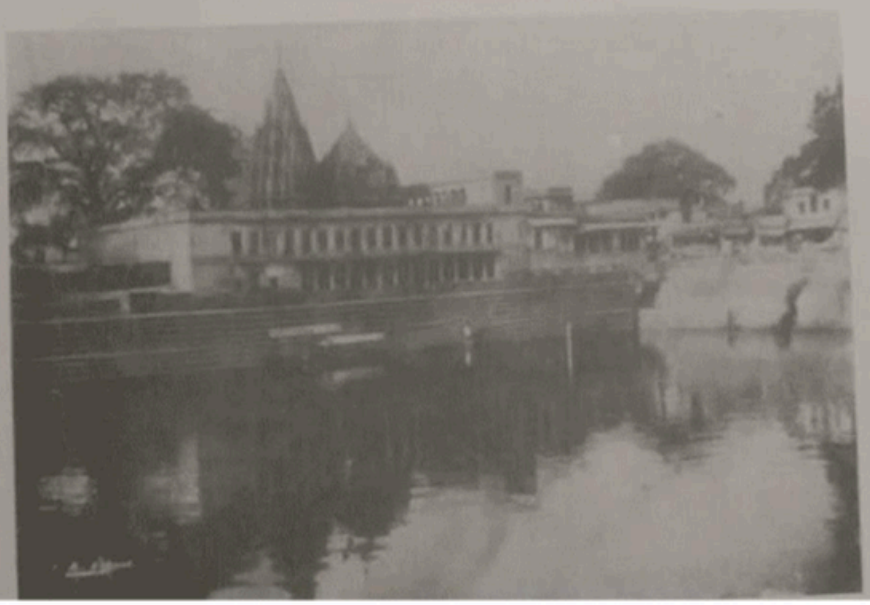


Ill. 5. (*above*) Dattātreya and Yama ghats with the ruined Sindhia ghat.
Ill. 6. (*below*) Hariścandra funeral ghat at the end of nineteenth century.

Ill. 7. (*above*) Bakariākuṇḍa (Barkarīkuṇḍa): picture taken late nineteenth century.
Ill. 8. (*below*) Oṃkāreśvara *liṅgam*.



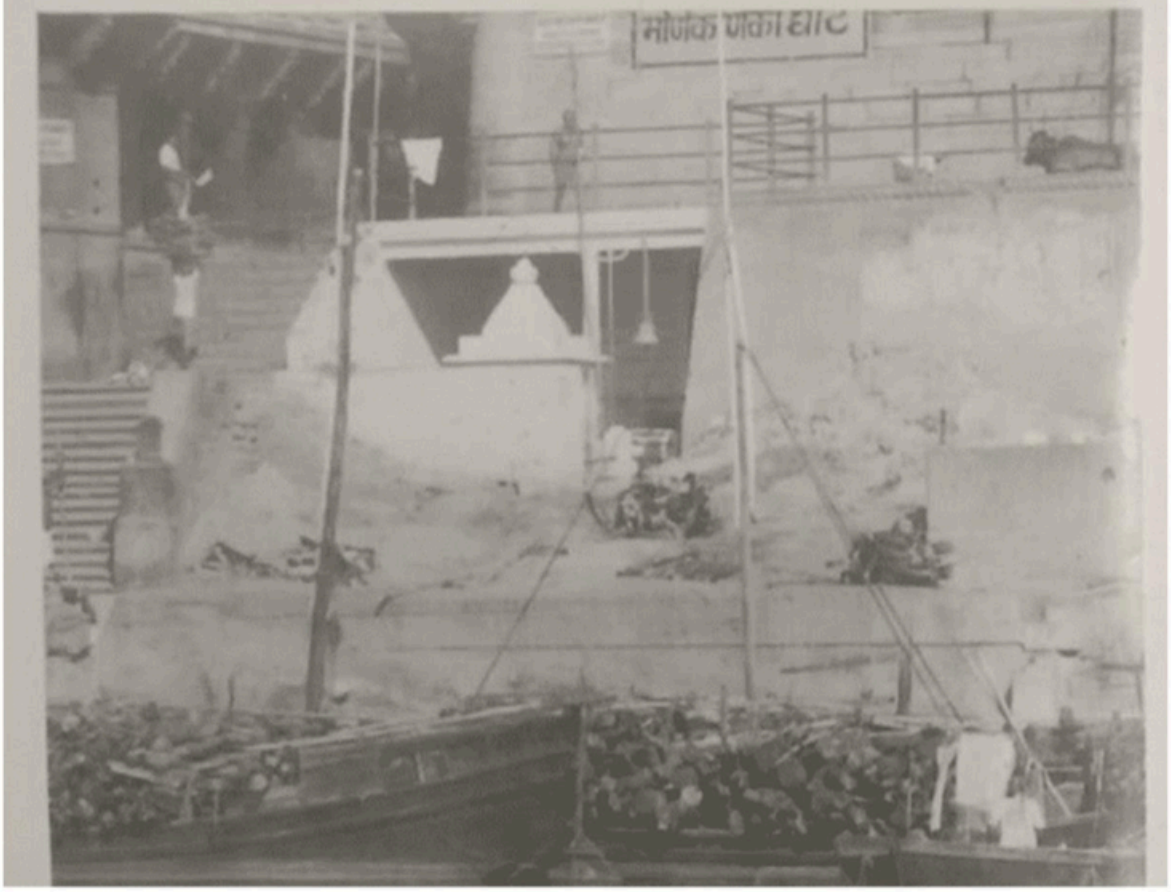
Ill. 9. (*above*) Monuments to Rāṇī Bhavānī's glory: Durgā temple. **Ill. 10.** (*below*) Durgākuṇḍa.

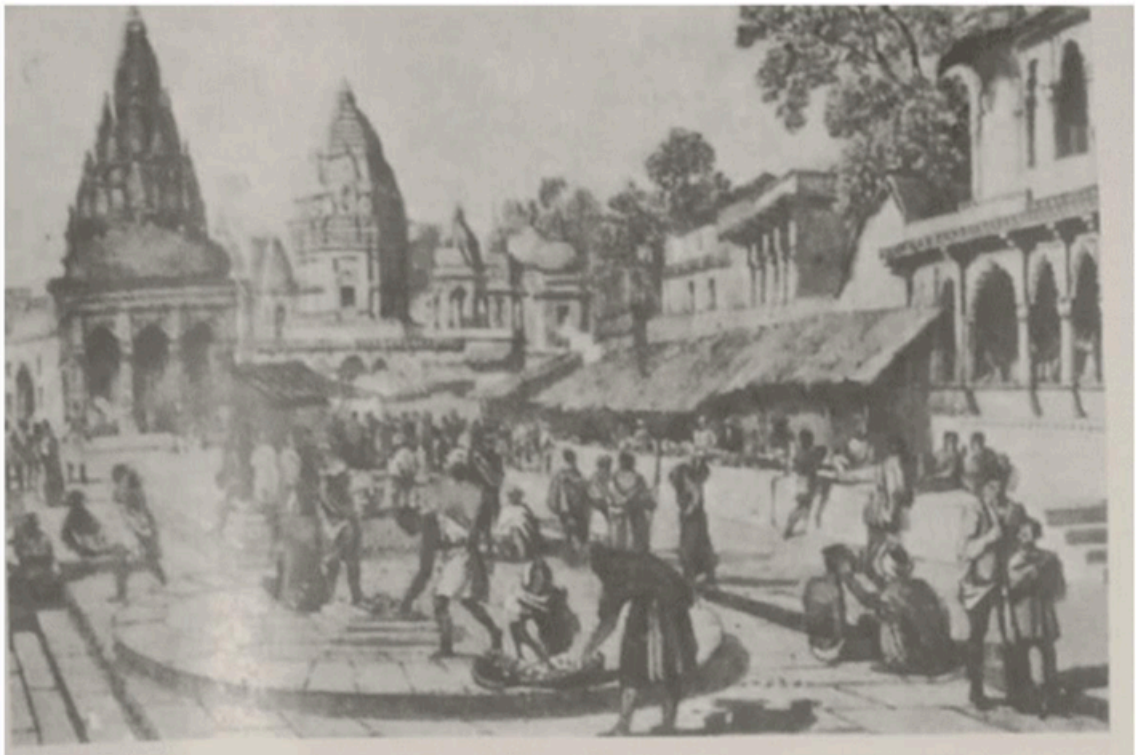


Ill. 11. (*above*) Mānmandir ghat: painting by James Prinsep.
Ill. 12. (*below*) The famed 'Jharokhā' of Mānmandir, details, painting by James Prinsep

Ill. 13. (*above*) Nepali Khapra ghat, Varanasi.
Ill. 14. (*below*) The quiet flows the Gaṅgā.

Ill. 15. (*above*) The Rājghāṭ Fort Mound (where excavations took place).
Ill. 16. (*below*) Maṇikarṇikā ghat.



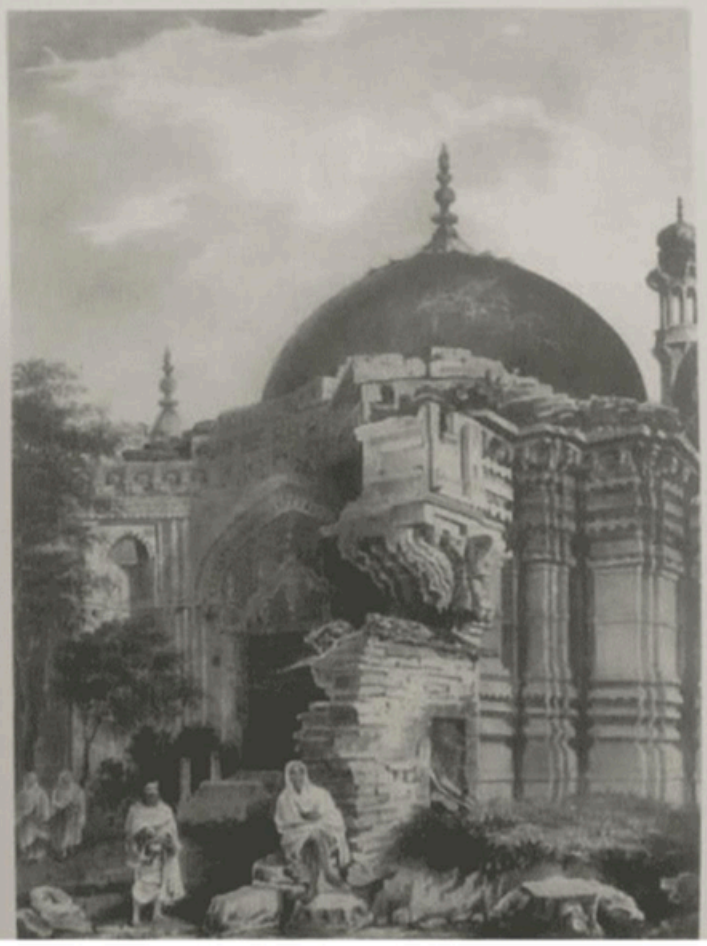


Ill. 17. (*above*) Maṇikarṇikā, Cakratīrtha and Brahmanālā.
Ill. 18. (*below*) Lalitā ghat.

Ill. 19. (*above*) Oṃkāreśvara temple.
Ill. 20. (*below*) Madhyameśvara shrine with Mṛtyuñjaya shrine standing at the back.

Ill. 21. (*above*) Kapiladhārā, as seen by James Prinsep.
Ill. 22. (*below*) Kṛttivāseśvara today: interior of 'Alamgiri Mosque, showing the 'Stump' where supposedly stood the Sanctum Sanctorum, and is now worshipped on Śivarātri day.

Ill. 23. (*above*) Ādi Viśvanātha on the Hill.
Ill. 24. (*below*) The ruins of the Viśvanātha temple.



Ill. 25. (*above*) The great Mandākinītālāo; drawn by James Prinsep. Baḍā Gaṇeśa is supposed to be behind the right hand grove.
Ill. 26. (*below*) The ever-watchful Bull Nandī of Jñānavāpī.

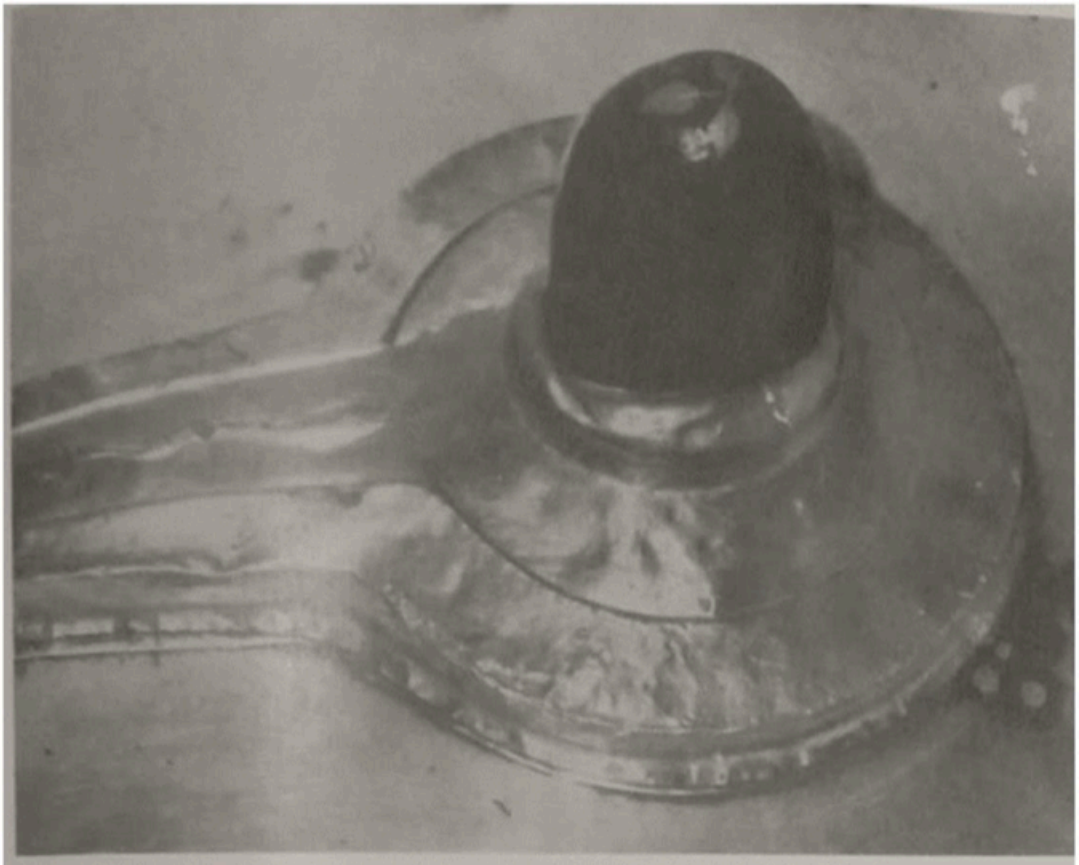
Ill. 27. (*above*) Bālājī ghat as seen by James Prinsep.
Ill. 28. (*below*) Bhīma ghat as seen by James Prinsep.

Ill. 29. (*above*) Daśāśvamedha ghat.

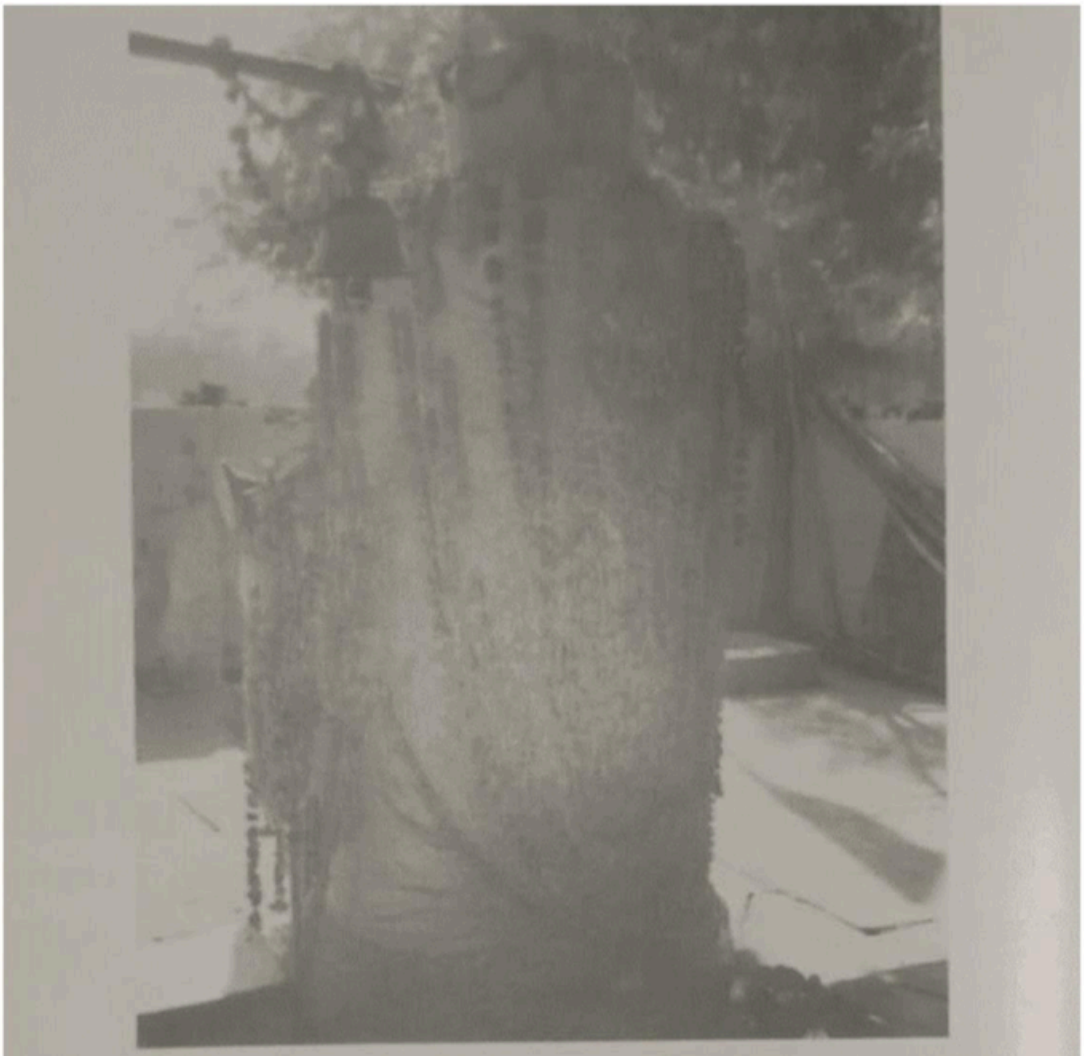
Ill. 30. (*below*) Pilgrims bathing at the Ganges (mid-nineteenth century) much with the same devotion and piety as now. Note the bamboo-woven umbrellas.

Ill. 31. (*above*) The Burhwāh Maṅgala Melā at Chet Singh (Kirkī ghat). Note the three windows supposed to have been used by Chet Singh in making his escape.

Ill. 32. (*below*) Viśvanātha temple towers covered with gold by the Sikh Mahārājā Ranjit Singh.



Ill. 33. (*above*) Kāśī Viśvanātha. **Ill. 34.** (*below*) Pakkī-Mahāl, Chaukhambā, middle o nineteenth century: painting by James Prinsep.



Ill. 35. (*above*) Lāṭ Bhairon.
Ill. 36. (*below*) Malaviya Bridge over the Ganges, with the tomb of Mir Rustam Ali in the foreground.

Ill. 37. (*above*) Kapālamocana tank in the dying stage.
Ill. 38. (*below*) Aurangzeb's mosque at Benīmādhab with Bālāji's Palace in the foreground, as seen by James Prinsep.

Ill. 39. (*above*) The city of Modern Varanasi as seen from Aurangzeb's minars.
Ill. 40. (*below*) Bharata milāp fair at the Varaṇā, as seen by James Prinsep.

northern holy places, Hindus had again been busy in raising temples. Taking advantage of this respite the Hindu community of Varanasi made efforts to build a temple atop the peak.

This alerted the diehard Shirqui-s of Jaunpur. We know that one of their princesses Begum Raziya decided to forestall, future Hindu reconstructions by erecting a magnificent mosque (fourteenth century) known as the Mosque of Raziya (wrongly supposed to be the work of Sultana Raziya of the Slave dynasty of Delhi).

It was probably at this critical juncture that some of the pious Hindus shifted the lingam to the neighbouring hill behind the present Satynarayana temple.

The lingam, as we know, had been spirited away by a pious Brah- min, and taken out of Varanasi. After a while the lost lingam made appearance in the Bhadauni area of Varanasi, but its reappearance was kept a closely guarded secret.

Even to this day the lingam is receiving due homage, however modestly, as the Adi or original Visvanatha. The construction of a small temple on this mound was possible through the gifts made by Govardhan Dasa, son of Todarmal, the famous minister of Akbar.

III

Since no big temple existed in Varanasi, none bothered to trouble the city. The rubbish heap on the neglected valley near the hills, stretching upto the banks of the Jnanavapi tank was all that was left to witness the total decay of the bygone glories of the great Moksa Laksmi-vilasa and its environs, standing on the western side of the great extensive tank Jnanavapi.

But ignoring all these ups and downs, by the foothills of the three peaks a quiet nalah flowed down to meet Agastyakunda (now Godhowlia). Here water flowing from Laksmikunda, Misirpokhara, Beniatalab, Surajkunda, the great Godavarinala, formed a stream, and flowed eastward to join the Ganga.

Otherwise the area now covered by Bansphatak and Terhinim used to be covered with thick woods from Kabiracaura to Benia. The police-station of Chowk and its environs stood on a marsh land which later provided lands for a church.

The area covered by Surajkunda and Laksmikunda upto Luxa also used to be wooded until 1890. The Godavari flow passed through what is now known as Dasasvamedha market, and Chittaranjan Park, and met the main river at Prayag ghat.

That all this is not just imagination is proved by the fact that there existed at two points of this river two bridges. The names of the bridges still cling to the spots. One, Dersi ka Pul, and the other, Püler Kali. (The Hindi word pul means a bridge.) There was a third bridge across the Godavari stream near the Marwari Hospital and Bara-Deo.

The area between the Chowk hill, where the original Moksa Laksmi-vilasa temple stood, and present Jnanavapi on the east and Godhowlia to the south had seen, though the ages for over 500 years, brain boggling destructions after destructions. The resultant collection of mounds over mounds of debris posed a major problem for clearance.

Part of this was pushed (1) towards the tank of Jnanavapi, specially after the last total demolition by Aurangzeb, (2) and part was pushed as down the hills to form the present Chowk-Godhowlia road, stretching through Bansphaṭak. The grading

of the debris is even now noticeable by the flights of steps in the former case and by a very steep slope with a sudden almost U-turn in the latter case. The mounds of debris must have existed uncleared for ever a couple of centuries.

The waters of Jnanavapi had been filled up by this mass of rubbish. As a reminder, to this day a narrow lane exists joining the broad street (made in modern times) and the Danḍapani lane. This lane is called Katwarkhana (Rubbish heap).

Because of the devastations caused over the centuries the area immediately close to the high hill, upto the Jnanavapi pond had been filled with the mound of rubbish. The gardens around the temple environs have turned into forgotten dreams. The trees around the hill, stood in naked ugliness fully illustrating the curse of a humiliated nation. By the time the British came, in their zeal to reorient the 'dirty' locality, and for the facility of running a 'motor- able' road from the centre of the town's hub (Chowk Kotwali) to the river, the hill with the skeletal wood had been dashed to form a slope. It runs through Bansphaṭak, and connects Godhowlia flats with the hill of the old Adi Visvanatha temple, which could be clearly seen from the Jnanavapi tank without any obstruction, except the huge mound collected over the centuries, and now replaced by a modern construction, housing a public library.

The recent temple found its existence only during the high days of the Marathas, when Mahadaji Scindhia was able to extract an indulgence from Emperor Shah Alam for rebuilding Varanasi as a Hindu holy city. Of this later on.

The debris had already been overwhelming the tank and its water. Whatever could be saved of the tank was destroyed and filled up in two stages.

We remember that Akbar, and following him his son Jahangir, had permitted the damaged temples to be rebuilt. (Jahangir's mother was a Hindu princess from the famous House of Amber.)

Taking advantage of this royal sanction the Hindu World of India began the work of reconstruction with a feverish zeal. It was at that time that some of the debris on the bank of the pond was cleared, and room was made for a new temple to be constructed. This is the temple that Govardhandasa helped to build.

IV

The hilly area, where stands to this day the Raziya Mosque, as well as the Adi Visvanatha temple (see Map), at the moment guards the southern border of the Chowk area. Providing a landmark at the edge of this hilly elevation stands the Flower Market, the Satya- narayana temple, and the locality now known as House Katora- Bansphatak. The broad public street connecting Chowk with Godhowlia runs along this apron. The busy street, with well-stocked shops on either sides completely misguides the mind of the enquirer.

Let us remove from the mind the presence of this misguiding construction of a road. Let us think of the mounds of rubbish and the total eclipse of the glory that was the great Visvesvara, and his temple. Let us visualise, and then reconstruct.

The most significant characteristic of this road, in spite of the mindlessness of the subsequent reconstructions, is its unmistakable steep elevation already referred to. From point A

of the map to point B a steady gradation of the land denotes a wooded hill, a valley, and a running stream in olden times. At point C stood the Jnanavapi complex; and at point D stood the big tank Agastyakunda.

In fact in considering the ancient lay out of the city of Varanasi against the more ancient lay out of the Anandakananam the most significant points would be just three: (1) the modern Bisesargunj Market and Kabiracaura: (2) the Godhowlia point and (3) the Jnanavapi complex.

In the ancient books Macchodari has been much emphasised to have been a point of great interest to the pious pilgrims.

There must have been some reason for this importance of the area. Macchodari means 'the middle portion of a fish'. What is this fish? How was it formed? Had it any relation with the general plan of Varanasi, the holy place?

In order to reconstruct that Fish-formation referred to, one has to reorganise the waterways around the northern extremity of the hill range on which present Varanasi town exists.

This side is bordered by the river Varana. The Mocchodari chan- nel connects the Varana with the extensive lake of that name. This lake was fed by the waters of the Ganga at flood. When the rush of the rising current entered through the Varana, it pushed the chan- nel up until the waters filled not only the Macchodari tank, but overflowed and rushed east, and poured it’s excess into the Man- dakinitalab.

We have already spoken of this lake, and its size. Even at the time of James Princep (1820s) the lake extended between the Bissesargunj point and Kabiracaura. The famous Bara Ganesa temple stood on its bank. We have to imagine that the entire

area, inclusive of the Post Office, Town Hall, Company Bag, reaching upto the northern borders from where the so-called Pakki-Mahal starts, was under this water.

In this lake the river Mandakini poured water. According to Narain Dutt "... the tank is called Matsyodari because it forms the middle of Varanasi". [TV, pp. 53, 69 (sixteenth century).] Even K. Kh. supports this. It says that the waters of this channel filled the moat around the mud-fort built by the Siva-ganas. It also insists that the flow was subject to two currents, one the outer surface current connected with the high rise of the flooded Ganga, and the other was a subterranean flow.

But the most important observation recorded refers to the fact that the two flows together made Macchodari an important source of water that surrounded Anandakananam, and the flow so rounded made ancient Kasi look like 'a Fish'; hence Macchodari. The flow so described came around a considerable area of what was then called Varanasi, and met the Varana near about what is now known as Omkaresvara and Kapalamocana.

Now, those who know where Kapalamocana is situated would be wondering at this statement made in the Purana.

Of course the bed of the Varana has shifted a long way. Still Kapalamocana stands close to the old river, and away from the Omkaresvara mound.

Unusually the much praised Matsyodari yoga does not enthuse the hearts of the pious. Such a complete encirclement of the city of Varanasi by the river Ganga through the Matsyodari channel, and the Mandakini flow, did take place often before; rarer now due to the changed topography of the modern city.

In those early days the flow passing through Matsyodari and the Mandakini passed through the lowlands now covered by what is known as Benia, only to connect the Godavari channel near what is now known as the Girjaghar near Godhowlia.

It may look surprising today. But in those days when the area was covered mostly by woods, and when human habitations were extremely rare, but for the Varana banks, these channels completely surrounded the main Varanasi, and formed a fish-like oval encirclement.

In this context we see the city in a new light, a new perspective altogether.

When the scriptures talk of the Matsyodari yoga, when the records speak of the encirclement of the Kasi-ksetra by the river Ganga, (a rare event now, if not impossible, thanks to the interference of the city-fathers which changed the topography entirely then that Kasi, that city was understandably confined within the Antargṛha, which we have described times and again in terms of the present land- marks.

It also explains that the main city of Kasi in those days hugged the banks of the Varana, and thus justified the name of the city Varanasya (changed to Varanasi), which means 'the city that faces the Varana'.

When the Ganga surrounded the whole city, and met the mainstream at the Prayaga Sangama, near Dasasvamedha, through the Godavarinala, the city south of Dasasvamedha, looking splendid now with its terraced temples and towers, did not exist.

That came much later, almost at our times, but not before the great Mughal Akbar's time any way.

With those records in mind let us try to visualise the Antargṛha of Varanasi of those days. The whole of Kabiracaura was covered with waters of the Mandakini. The Tãlão extended upto the foot- hills of the Pakki Mahal, and the Mandodari on one side and Matsyodari channel on the other. It filled the middle area with so much water as ships and boats could ply, and bring goods to the famous markets of Bisesvargunj and Katra Dinanatha. These are still the traditional market centres of Varanasi, along with the great silver gold and silk markets of Pakki Mahal, Lachmicabūtara and Narialṭola.

The most famous and popular market of the trained female entertainers of the time, and of the prostitutes, still occupy these localities.

8

The Great Rape

I

The most ancient records available describe Varanasi as a city standing around three major 'hills' as we know. These may not be distinctly distinguishable now because of the thorough devastations caused by the city builders of subsequent centuries. But the fact stands that the ancient Varanasi did stand, as we have already noted, on and around the three hills. And these hills, despite the deva- stations, have left tale-telling definite traces.

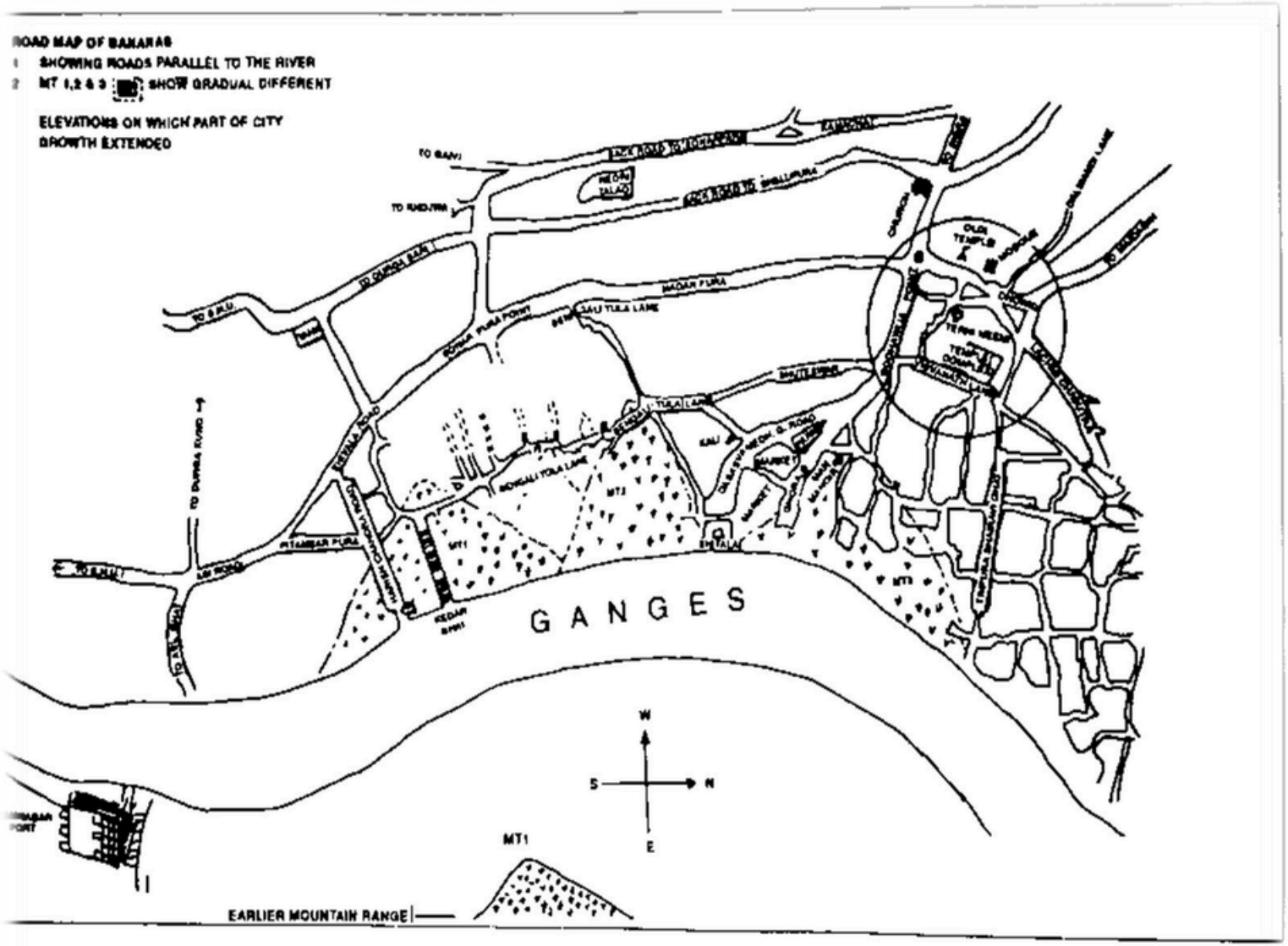
One has only to be on the look out for the mute evidences, however faint.

Our study contained in the previous chapter illustrates the point.

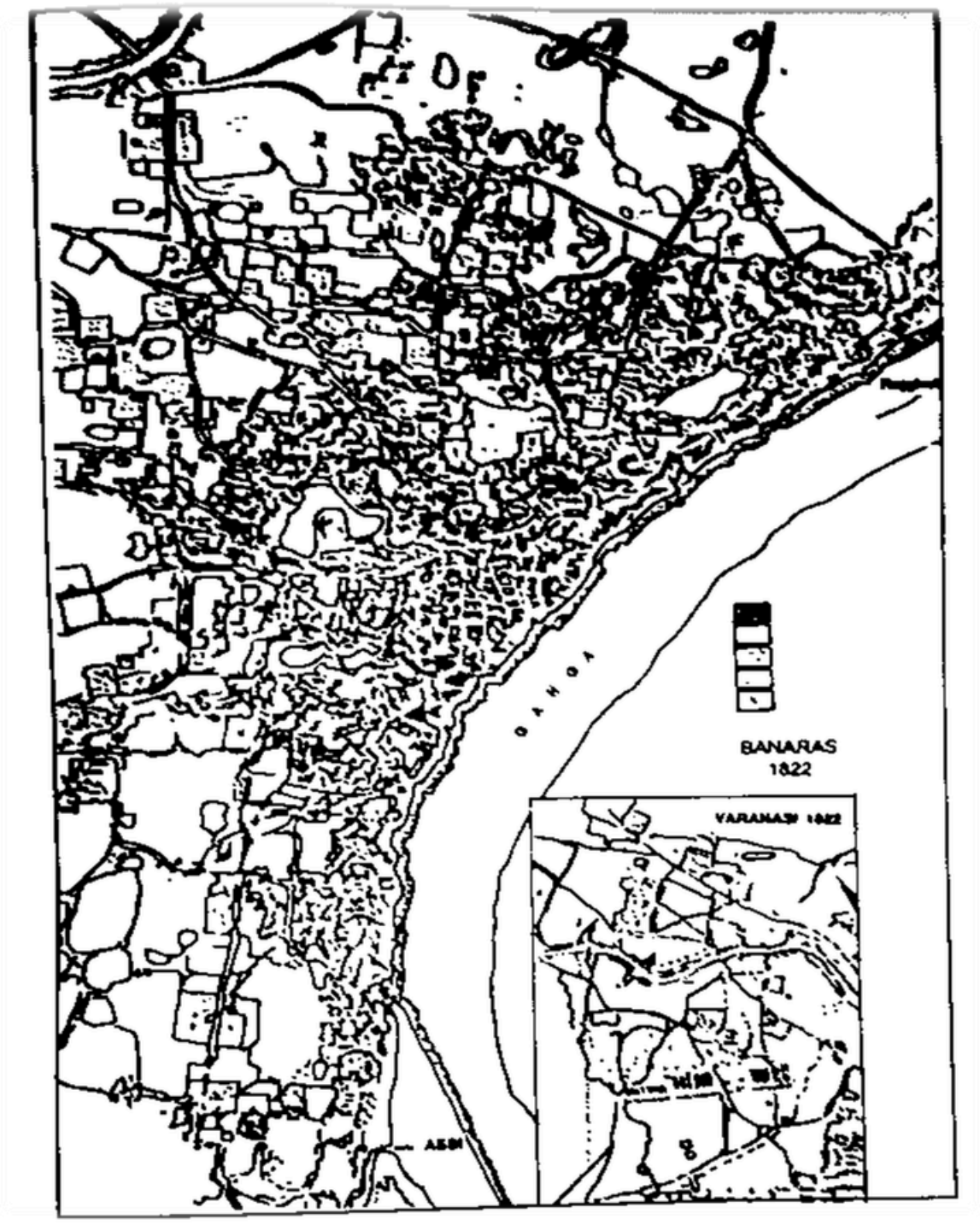
Just to explain why a tank could be named Macchodari (Belly of a fish) we had to go around an entire area of a township known as Varanasi. Today's layout of this part of the city belies the explana- tion. It becomes, difficult to appreciate (a) that once upon a time this section was the real city; (b) that the southern part of the city beyond the Godhowlia-point was not inhabited, except by the Bhara-s, Bhanda-s, Gana-s, Bhairavas, worshippers of Yaksas, Bir-s, Kaladevas and Ganadevas; (c) that most of the township, south of the Varana was covered with water; (d) that the Ganga would have encircled the whole town (from the Varana to Kapalamocana) and join the Godavari via the Benia Park and Lachmikunda; (e) that the water encircled the town like an island most hill; and lastly (f) the area could have been almost covered with hermitages, ashramas, shrines and guest-houses.

Studied with scrutiny, these facts reveal another very interesting feature, which concerns the rivers and lakes of ancient Varanasi.

The lost rivers and lakes of Varanasi could still be traceable with the help of certain land features, and extant names of localities. The non-existent, as it were, could be established with the assistance of the existent.



Map 9. Varanasi with gradual variation



Map 10. Development of the city: Banaras 1822

In rediscovering Varanasi these traces of the 'lost' rivers, lakes and the hill-features would prove to be of immense value to us, and provide us with significant guidelines.

II

Speaking of the three ancient divisions (khanda) the most important was Visvanatha khanda. It covers the central hill, or Antargrha area between Adikesava and Dasasvamedha in the east, and the Kabiracaura-Rajadarwaja-Benia-Godhowlia in the west. This area comprehensively represents the highest altitude of the city of Varanasi inclusive of the all important area of Chowk, or the Visvanatha Hill.

We shall also, by and by, come to know why, and how at all this Chowk area became so distinguished, popular and crowded.

This area presents to us the most bewildering and confusing picture of the ancient Varanasi. This is so because this important area was situated on the highest level of the retreat of Anandakananam. This most secluded area is today the most busy and crowded section of the town. The transformation is remarkable. Thereby hangs a tale.

Here stood the great temple with its family of subsidiary shrines. Naturally it formed the most frequented cluster of daily pilgrim- ages. In spite of ages of Islamic devastations, and the resultant dam- aging changes, the popularity of this area has been holding its ground.

In and around this area shrines after shrines, had been destroyed and rebuilt. But the fond memories of the devotees, like

memories of old pets, in spite of catastrophic changes, found relief and security in clinging to this very area.

Our visits to the burial grounds where our beloveds lie interred are inspired and sustained by similar sentiments. There would not be any Yarrow poems, or Scholar Gipsy without the backing of such sentiments, 'Fond memory brings the light of other days around me'. Forces of memory activise the laws of atavism and instinct; and external pressures are hard put to extinguish these altogether.

These ups and downs continued for more than seven hundred years. The seven hundred years of degeneration, disintegration and confusion upset Kasi-Varanasi to its marrows. For seven hundred Years the populace of Varanasi churned by a series of holocausts, whirled by a centripetal draw of piety and endearness, repeatedly turned to this peak of sustenance, the Visvanatha peak.

Sentiments that draw the intellectual Jew to the Jerusalem Wall, or the Islamic faithfuls to the waters of Zam-Zam, draw the lynched, racked and hamstring population of Varanasi to the solace of this peak. By the warmth of their piety they turned Nemesis into Resurrection, and retribution into atonement.

III

The change from the tapovana-phase of Anandakananam and Avimuktam to the Varanasi-phase must have been completed much before the Islamic intervention (1194), even before the great Prophet had even been born; or for that matter, even before the Christ's birth. For that we have to go back to the days of the noble Gautama Buddha. The earlier clashes between them and the Brahmanas had changed the earlier peaceful tone

of the ancient Mahasmasana or Rudravasa. Temple building had started after the Scythians introduced them; and that changed the wooded Ananda- kananam of the Ganas, Yaksas and Kapalikas into a Brahmanical centre.

The Hindu citadel of Anandakananam had always been a reputable centre for Vedic studies. We know of the Brahmavasa, and Brahmasarovara near Dasasvamedha where students came to stay and study. The Buddha was naturally attracted to this centre as a piece of iron to a magnet. If he had to conquer the Vedic form, he had to convert Varanasi and its scholars first. (Swami Dayananda too tried this in the nineteenth century.)

But the Buddha, according to the Jatakas, had come to

Varanasi, and not to the Anandakananam. That resort suffered further devastation through the feuds between the Haihayas and Pratiharas, i.e., Divodasa and Pratardana. Echoes of the feuds are heard in the Vedas as well as in K. Kh. These feuds have also been referred to as 'distur- bances' caused by the Ganas, i.e., the native communes and the migrating Aryans.

The string of monuments scattered throughout Varanasi as Bir monuments remind us of the Arya-Gana feuds. A Bhairava, a Kapala, a Yakşa, or a Ganapati shrine stands commemoration of the final take-over of Siva people from the encroaching Vedics. These monu- ments still stand as witnesses to the many compromises ending the blood battles.

We have already noted the encirclement of Varanasi by the Gana- Nayakas, and their shrines. We have noted the Bhairon shrines as well. The Bira, Kapala, Yaksa and Deo shrines are even more ancient.

Since those days of horrible feuds to this day, Hindus do not start any religious ritual without first paying homage to this compromise, remembered in the forms of Bhairava, Bir and Ganapati. In all Hindu rites precedence is given to Ganesa, or Gana-Nayaka, the leader of the Gana-s, the Master of the Hosts.

It therefore, could be concluded that the Vedic conquerors, before establishing themselves in the Avimuktaksetra (the valley from where Siva would not get displaced or parted), had accepted the indigenous deities, namely, the Bhairava (Tantra-Siva) and his cohorts. Under their powerful protection. He continued His perpetual mys- tic dalliance with Sakti. Visvanatha is the Bhairava, Siva's other self. [(Visalaksi is His alter ego, the Bhairavi) (cf. the Vajrayana combine of Yamantaka and Tara).]

The crux of the matter is that in spite of the feuds and devastations the pre-Vedic character of the Anandakananam remained un- changed, and the present crescent township remains to this day a meeting ground of all shades of faith in Hinduism, Vedic or non- Vedic.

Change from the Gana period to the Deva period must have taken altogether a few centuries until the times of Divodasa and Pratardana.

Thus the Anandakananam of the Gana-Sivas and Rudra-Sivas got changed into Varanasi, the omnibus name assumed by the holy tapovana, once named Rudravasa.

This again had undergone changes at the hands of the sweeping devastations caused by Hindu rulers like Ajatasatru (fourteenth cent. BC). The change of Varanasi, into Kasi could have taken place at this time. (Vrijji records). The series of attacks by the

Haihayas, and Kalacuri Kings forced, as we know, the Gahadavalas to shift their capital to the south of the river Varana. (Tenth century AD.)

Thus was Anandakananam formally changed to Varanasi. The arboreal abode assumed an urbanised name. The popularity of the name made history record four Varanasi-s instead of one.'

After all these devastations, after the Veda-Gana-Buddhist upheavals, came the most telling attacks of them all, from the Afghans.

The deluge made Varanasi duck and duck and duck again, finally to gain ground, only changed beyond recognition. It is a case of metamorphosis.

Let us visualise these devastations in terms of actual tonnage of ruins collected over the centuries. The main burden of those ruins must have been concentrated on and around the central hill where stood the ancient shrine of Visvanatha.

These we have noted already, had to be cleared again and again, and in the process the city had to be rebuilt again and again.

Our task, therefore, appears to be a formidable one. We have to reconstruct the Anandakananam, or Varanasi as described in K. Kh., or by Fa-hien, and Hiüen Tsang.

The many rivers, lakes and ponds, all held in holy regard, had been molested beyond recognition. The vandalising forces from age to age must have found it easier to remove the hills of debris created through their frenzied misdeeds, and dump the rubbish heaps into the ponds and rivers around, or just leave them alone.

Their frenzy of destruction never stopped to consider if their act would cut off man's life from a vital requirement like water, or if by their unthinking act they would permanently remove natural evi- dences of a cultural history of great importance. (Such heinous acts continue even today in the year 1991 of the Lord, and the powers that be, cynically watch Varanasi vandalised by a Land-granting en- croaching consortium.)

In destroying these lakes, forests, ponds and waterways they were disturbing for ever that beauty, poise and peace, for which the val- leys of the three hills were renowned.

More importantly, their acts would in time remove lots of signifi- cant historical evidences. (The author has been a witness to the demise of such landmarks Surajkunda and Bakariakuṇḍa. Now the great Isargangitalão has been 'attacked'. This all by the Hindus.)

Through this kind of unthinking acts the beautiful tapovana named the Anandakananam was for ever destroyed. Its natural calm and peaceful spirit had eroded permanently through the political disturbances between the kings of Kasi and Magadha (1840-1484 BC), and Kasi and Kosala (644-1194). These last had forced the kings of Kasi to think of a change of the capital, which took place at the time of the Gahadavala (1094). The city extended from the ancient Varana-front towards the Pancaganga hills, across the Macchodari and along the Ganga.

Even at that, the real damage was negligible. The heart and soul of Anandakananam, which still remained far south of the city (upto Sankaṭamocana) maintained its character and features upto 1910.

From topographical and archaeological evidence it has been estab- lished that the old city of Varanasi occupied the present Rajghat area. It extended along the banks of the Matsyodari and Mandakini- talao-s (taḍaga). A Gahadavala inscription records that the Gahada- vala kings (who built the Fort) loved to bathe at the Adi Kesava ghat at the Varana confluence.

The Macchodari Channel (through the Mandakini allowed large boats and ships to navigate from the Ganga, and reach the big market directly.

Despite the many upheavals, the heart of Anandakananam had been, more or less, left alone. Kasi, the kingdom with its capital Varanasi coexisted with the wooded Anandakananam, though the sudden influx of a commercial and secular populace changed the norm and mood of the forest abode. Upto seventh cent. BC the sylvan verdure of Anandakananam appears to have remained intact.

The successive Afghan and Afridi attacks, followed by the attacks of the Tughlaqs, Khaljis and Lodhis brought about a sea change in the peaceful life of Anandakananam (1194-1660).

First the cupidity of the freebooters, and secondly the cold sinister cynicism of the white imperialists, finally erased whatever was yet left of Varanasi. Real Varanasi and Anandakananam was pulverised by cupidity and a sad connivance of those who proclaim to be the 'city-fathers'.

Molesting nature's bounty in the name of religion, commerce, or straight cynicism is the blackest of transgressions against history and culture. Environmental freshness is Nature's bounty. Man could destroy it with impunity, but he cannot create it.

No wonder that a present day enquirer would feel confused about the traces of these inland water resources. These, according to the evidences of the Jaina-Buddhist records, Puranas and reports of foreign travellers, adorned the ancient Anandakananam, as well as the historical Varanasi.

Today's Varanasi does not leave a clue to the topography described in K. Kh., and in the later historical records of the foreign travellers.

VI

It might be relevant here to refer to the grandeur of Moksa Laksmi- vilasa temple as described by Hiüen Tsang.

According to his accounts there were in his times (AD 643)

nearly about one hundred popular and sacramentally important temples in Varanasi. Of these Moksa Laksmi-vilasa was the largest and the tallest. The grand view of the golden tower could be sighted from the northern bank of the river Varaṇa, even from a great distance.

He also mentions about the existence of about twenty Buddhist

monasteries around Varanasi, although the city itself had none except, perhaps the one already mentioned and situated quite close to the main shrine, Mokşa Laksmi-vilasa.

Materials still available in the great mosque corroborate the recorded evidence. Archaeologists have found that the brackets, rail- ings, arches, corner claps and pillars used in the construction of the mosque, indicate irrefutable Jaina and Buddhist antecedents.

Be that as it may, no trace of any other Buddhist construction now remains in the present city of Varanasi.

Of course Sarnath remains a glorious exception. Even at that, we of the modern days had no knowledge whatsoever of the lost loca- tion of the now famous Buddhist complex.

Sarnath's discovery was accidental, when in the course of laying a rail line, these intriguing ruins came to an engineer's notice. Luck- ily the ruins so discovered were saved by the archaeological depart- ment of the Government of India. It is a pity that the Rajghat ruins could not be saved in time.

But was Sarnath indeed so much away from the city of Varanasi? Or, was the city's northern wing across the Varana erased by a series of attacks? Where was then situated the city of Varanasi?

Sarnath, away and across the modern (Post-Gahadavala) city's perimeter, and across the Varana, has unearthed a remarkably big Buddhist complex. And we know from the evidence of the Jatakas that Gautama Buddha delivered his first sermon in the 'city' of Varanasi (530 BC). In fact he lived at Sarnath for a very long while.

This is yet another evidence that shows that the city of

Varanasi, capital of Kasi, was situated astride both the banks of the river Varana.

The great Chinese traveller describes in stirring language the beauties of Varanasi and its temples.

He describes the temple as the central piece of a well-spread gar- den secured with paved walk-ways. He particularly mentions the wide temple yards, which were covered with expensive smoothed stone tiles. The walls were beautified with carved and tasteful sculptures in stone. We have no doubt that his descriptions of the city referred to the area. Stretching from

the Varana in the north to the Visvanatha Hill in the south, inclusive of the present shopping centres of Bisvesvaragunj, Pakki Mahal, Kunjitola and Dalmaṇḍi.

The most remarkable of his descriptions pertained to the sublime and expensive Siva-image itself. It was made of solid copper, in the likeness of a man with a sublime and peaceful aspect seated in the lotus posture of a yogi. It stood 66 cubits (about a hundred feet) high!

That would be a load of copper, indeed enough to tempt the cupidity of a gang of mercenary loot-hungry Afghan tribe.

Besides the evidence of the travellers referred to above, we have the evidence of the Puranas, of which the Kasikhaṇḍa of Skanda Purana is most relevant to us. The Vayu and the Agni Puraṇas are helpful. If we have to arrive at definite conclusions about the past of Varanasi, we cannot afford to neglect the evidences of K. Kh., and K. Mhtm.

Let us not summarily reject K. Kh., as just a lore, an 'imaginary' travesty of facts to suit the fancies of some run away poet, Puraṇas, as a rule chronicle popular beliefs, traditions and messages of the time. They do not invent.

By and by we hope to reveal the lost Varanasi by using the remains of the three hills for which, understandably, Kasi was described as an out-of-the-world holy place balanced on the 'trident' of Siva. The three hills would most fittingly image a 'trident' in associating Varanasi with Siva, and support a further claim that 'Kasi stood quite apart and above all other human habitations.'

Presence of three hills in an island in the Caribbean Sea made Columbus name it as Trinidad. There are several Trinidads in

the world. Naming places on the basis of physical features is a common practice amongst colonisers.

We have already stated that the highest point of Varanasi is the Chowk. In this area stands the Mosque of Raziyya Begum (c. 1473) of the Jaunpur Sharqui-s.

Quite adjacent to the mosque, as we have been noting, stands the humble temple that Govardhandas had built, and which is reputed to be housing the Adi Visvanatha, the one that probably Sikandar Lodhi had uprooted.

This could have been the site where the original Moksa Laksmi- vilasa described by the Chinese traveller had stood. It would be dif- ficult to recapture the grandeur of the temple with its beautifully laid out garden, as its present described by Hiüen Tsang in torrid, stuffed choling congestion.

Today the site is overcrowded as a commercial mart. It is entirely vulgarised. But when there were no commercial stores, no hint of smelly lanes crowded by prostitutes and pimps, when the slopes of the hills gradually approached the waters of the Jnanavapi, the elegance of the grand temple complex, set against a green backdrop must have been awe-inspiring.

Here the Chinese scholar had seen the temple in all its glory. He had seen sensitively designed gardens, hostels, rest-houses, living quarters for the temple attendants, musicians, beautiful dancing girls and vocalist entertainers known as Devadasi-s (gathered from the most upgrade families of the land), stables for elephants and horses, and embellished with running fountains and watery tanks, and lined with sophisticated merchandise in galleries of shops.

This need not surprise us. The examples of such ruins as Angkor Wat, Angkor Thom, Borobudur, Bhubanesvara, Puri, Konarka, Madurai, Tiruchirapalli, Ramesvaram, Srirangam, Trivandrum, Bellur, Halebid, Hampi and many others convince us about the existence of such extensive temple complexes, which remind us of similar complexes of Babylon, Ur, Persepolis and Palestine.

This is also, incidentally, the highest salient feature in the city of Varanasi. When the Chinese traveller stood amazed at the beauty of the tall golden tower of the temple standing higher than all other structures, he could not have referred to any building other than this one. It was this very temple which had been devastated by successive Afghan inroads. (The author suspects if the Chinese savant had not seen the towers of Krttivasesvara, Omkaresvara and Madhya- mesvara.)

The massive wealth of the temples made them coveted targets for the raiders. They wanted to collect their loot, and justify their bloody sorties on religious pretexts.

It could be imagined, therefore, that the wealth of the principal temple of Varanasi was fabulously proportionate to the tonnage of as valuable a metal as copper of which a 100 ft. high image was made!

Together with the temples of Omkara, Krttivasa, Avimukta, Kalesvara, Madhyamesvara and Dantahasta, Varanasi's temple-wealth must have provided enough fortune to justify the risk the hungry raiders from Afghanistan and Persia had taken.

It is not difficult to imagine that the wealth, and nothing else indeed, provided incentive to the subsequent holocaust. (The destructions of the famous temples of Saurasṭra, as those of

Minaksi, Tanjore and Vijayanagara substantiate similar cases in point.)

VII

Let us study in greater details the Temple-area, and its environs. Today this area is known as the Chowk Area. Half a century back it was known as the Naya Chowk. Chowk is a synonym for a 'town square', or the important 'centre', or trade centre of a township. There is no doubt that this 'topmost' part of the hill range became 'an important area' due to the presence of the all-important tem- ple. All trade and commerce, understandably, pivoted around the Temple. From Jnanavapi to Macchodari, both sides of the sloping hill buzzed with commerce. Then, as well as now. The town's busi- ness begins and ends here. So this was 'Chowk', the Town Square.

But why 'Naya' Chowk?

The word 'Chowk' described the post-Hindu concept of a citycentre. The 'Old' Chowk must have been adjacent to the temple- complex which must have been destroyed by successive alien raids in the interest of loot.

Varanasi was too important a commercial city to be without a central market-place. Hence the British found it administratively a necessity to organise a central market complex which came to be known as 'Naya Chowk', the 'new market square' in supercession of the 'old market', which was no longer functioning. Administrative compulsions of the post-Hastings era (specially after 1857) justified the construction of the Police headquarters here, specially to gain a firm control over the city-thugs and goons.

The new administration ran a 'motorable' road right from the new railway station at Rajghat to Dasasvamedha, past the Godhowlia- point. This meant that the road would span either side of the central hill. This road passing through the old temple area had to dash through hills of rubbish accumulated over the centuries. That exercise would have been blocked by the Mandakini Talão on one side, and the Jnanavapi and Godavaritalão-s on the other. As the simplest solution to get over this keep-back was to fill up the lake and the river. The heaps of rubble collected over centuries came in handy. The Talão and the river were blocked off, and a road was laid out.

The key-point of British administration was the 'police'. The presence of a formidable Thana or Police Station as the arm of an estab- lishment was considered as imperative as a crown for a monarch. It was an effective symbol of power.

For the Police Headquarters of Varanasi the British

Administra- tion could not have hit upon a more commanding place than this ancient and popular market atop the most important hill on which the great temple was situated.

After demolishing the entire locality and cleaning it of the

many lanes, by-lanes and the rif-raffs of underworld transactions they created what came to be known as the Naya Chowk, which the Police Station dominates. The old Muslim Adalat (court-house) used to be situated close by. There still exists an 'old chowk' known as Purana Chowk.

In order to give this reconstruction a new face the entire eastern

side was covered by a series of two-storey buildings of modern archi- tecture, and the extreme end near Kacaurigali was sealed up by an imposing arch.

The western side was left alone. The old lanes were left untouched. Here was, and still continues to be, the Red Light area of Varanasi.

The present writer was born (1910) and brought up in Varanasi. All along the growth of his maturing life this aspect of the city and its peculiar layout has bothered him. He wanted to know why at all these shops, and anti-moral perversions should brush shoulders with the holiest of holy temple environs.

And why most of the traders here are Muslims, and why they invariably traded in the foreign fanciful items of tinsel-fancy-value, from combs and tapes to mirrors, glass-globes, hair-oils, powder- cases and German-toys?

The social dispensation of the population inhabiting these districts naturally should have been the Hindus, and the Buddhists.

But it is not.

Starting from this central area of Dalmanḍi and spreading to the west and south through Benia and Kudai-chowki, the old smelly little homes in smelly narrow alleys are filled with the converts to the Islamic faith. Muslims of high lineage and distinction avoid to live hereabout. Almost all of these converted populace are crafts- men. They are now wedded to their traditional ancient crafts which they had been plying in the pristine Aryan, Buddhist and Hindu days of glory.

Their placid homes had been destroyed by foreign attacks, and their even-paced life-rhythm had been devastated by the tumultu- ous onslaught of alien raiders.

Man could be forced to change his religion under duress, but his inborn, acquired and inherited subjective self, as well as his actual means of livelihood depending on his crafts and professions, by and large, remain unchanged even when challenged by forced conver- sion.

The realities of man's occupational and guild loyalties are hard and solid enough to withstand the aggressive challenges of conversion.

Man has to eat. For eating he has to earn; and for earning he relies on his traditional and syndicated guild crafts. Varanasi's skill in crafts have been commanded in the Epics and the Jatakas.

Forced conversion may add to the egocentric glory of the powers that convert, but the soul of the inner man so converted fails to respond to change his natural skill and ancestral craft.

Man may be compelled to submit to a totally humiliating and accidental collapse, but his sentiments remain not only unconvinced, but even resentful. He could even bear a mortal grudge against his humiliators, and pass it on to his progenies and blood-relations as an heirloom of permanent vendetta.

In course of time that vendetta subjects him to grow a complex. He develops an aberration, a psychological hold back. Victimised by a grudge, and under the influence of a complex, he could gradu- ally, grow an abnormally negative personality resenting even his erstwhile compatriots, or co-believers.

Often the convert turns out to be a fanatic. Fanaticism usually grows out of demolished and crushed ego, and gradually moulds itself into a barbed personality. Tormentors in history

have always been found to have suffered from complexed growth in life. Throttled ego could act as a sleeping volcano.

Civilisations in history, which had to undergo the ignominy of forced conversions often produced the most insufferable tyrants, and they have unconsciously caused bloody carnage and devastations to other civilisations.

The convert always feels on the defensive. All of a sudden he finds himself ostracised outcasted from his native herd, and yet in the scheme and pattern of his means of livelihood he remains, or has to remain (knowing no better) within the guild of his ancestral craft. His changed religion fails to change his means of livelihood. (Most of the sculptors in Jaipur who carve Hindu deities are Muslims dedicated to their craft.)

Professional confidence in ancestral trade is a cognisable feature in tracing the growth of civilisation.

More importantly, the common man is hard put at having to change his traditionally acquired skill, which gives him his life-bread and home. The hard facts of life keep him more closely tied to his day-to-day bread-giving professional skill, than to the enforced de- any God-consciousmand of a changed religion, or for that matter ness at all. In life, bread proves to be the first God, and a mother is justly regarded as a provider.

No better graphic example of this sordid truth could be found than in the life-style of the devoted Muslim craftsman of Varanasi. (Generally speaking, this analysis covers the major part of the con- verted society.)

The people, though ostracized, had also come under the influence of an alien, but a sophisticated genuine culture

(Persian culture). Soon it was to flourish under the patronage of the nawabs of Lucknow.

To the credit of the converts of Varanasi it must be noted here that the name of Varanasi as a centre of the world famous handicrafts principally rests on its mixed population, specially on its Muslim grid.

It is remarkable to notice that the fraternity of craftsmen of

Varanasi is happily composed of both its Hindu and Muslim popu- lation.

Even during the bloody patches of politically motivated and incited days of communal disharmony the craft-guild of Varanasi holds on to its own code of conduct, and stamps its identity by observing the virtues of togetherness. The artisan-trader-guild-bond of Varanasi is an amazingly smooth flowing continuity that would surprise many a social-economist.

IX

In this regard it is historically useless to cast blames for the destruction of Varanasi on the foreign onslaughts alone.

The records of the pre-Muslim period do not encourage the historian to absolve the Jaina, Buddhists, or the Hindu kings such as the Pratiharas and the Gahadavalas (Prasenjit and Ajatasatru). These too, when opportunity came by handy, attacked, destroyed, even indulged in conversions. Little did they realise that the destruction of social institutions means the destruction of a historical identity.

More importantly, it also means the destruction of human material. In organising a mad loot of wealth amassed over centuries the looters suffer less; but the looted suffer a spiritual damage

that mortifies personal self-respect, and national ego; it unhinges the mind, and thereby thwarts national personality. Such mad attacks organise mass destruction of Man's faith in Man. A fanatic posture is gradually adopted for making up a spiritual loss. The soul of Man, as that of a culture, goes permanently deranged by the vehemence of a holocaust. Jew-baiting in Europe is a case in point. The so-called religious wars could be viewed as wars for power and loot, economic advantage and commercial gains. Religion provides a pious mask for the scoundrel and the murderer in action, too timid to show their real face.

Religion has often been used as a handy excuse, a clever cover for unethical accumulation of property, and acquisition of power. But the real cause acting behind such adventures lies in man's insatiable greed for power and wealth. In this sense India has never been a peaceful place to live in, specially for the dumb-driven proletariat, the condemned in the socio-economic hierarchy. They know the peace of the dead, and swallow in silence the anger of the frustrated. Hindus were no exception to this, for the Hindu too is a man. They too had fought their inter-religious battles during the days of Saiva-Vaisnava, Brahmana-Gana and more prominently during the Buddha and Tantra skirmishes.

The Hindu political system itself did not improve matters.

These systems enjoined on the rulers to enter periodically into wars with the weaker potentates, and try hard to extend their boundaries of power. (Manu and Macchiaveli are no different). They had also been enjoined to keep their forces well groomed for instant re- sponses, and if necessary, for the usual seasonal aggressive attacks, which had almost become a ritual. Hindu

polity recommended it, and Hindu valour attested it. (Sukraniti, Arthasastra, Santiparvam of the Mahabharata)

For this purpose a special day in the year (the eighth day of the bright fortnight of the month of Asvin) was dedicated to the great goddess of war, Mahisamardini Devi Durga. On this 'auspicious' day rulers were called upon to march ceremonially on other rulers for the 'divine' appointed task of extending their respective territories. (Or, in other words providing opportunities to the lower-rank camp-followers for 'earning a livelihood' through plunder and ray- age.)

The consequent inhuman brutality of such periodical aggressions, as well as the complete lack of all kinds of civil ethics at times of war, added deplorable, though avoidable, misery to the already struggling poor. Heartless cynicism added to ferocious greed (often dire need), kept the working man struggling for a hearth under the same sun. The people enmasse stood unnerved before such organised and cynically ferocious, but senseless, wars.

But there was a difference.

The propensity of the new aggressors initiated them for molesta- tion of the women folk in general. In particular their total contemptuous rejection of the religious beliefs of the people, added to their earnestness for forceful conversion and naked greed. Such features, hitherto unknown in India, added new dimensions to the new wars.

In the formal wars which ancient Hindu kings were enjoined to organise, their property and identity, their homestead and society, their sense of honour, pride of family and ancestral beliefs stood by them. They assimilated all misery in course of

time, because though defeated, they were neither totally dishonoured, nor excommunicated from their gods and society. The humiliations concerned a person, a clan, but, by and large, the mass remained untouched.

The Persians, the Parthians, the Greeks, the Kusaṇas, the Bactrians had attacked India and entrenched themselves. They got ab- sorbed by an enlightened people, a bounteous land.

But the new enemies from the north-west delighted in different methods unknown hitherto.

Against the ferocity and totality of that aggression the poor people, now deprived of the protective umbrella of their respective rul- ers, stood helpless. They were rendered forcibly naked of their faith. Of the many forms of tyranny they suffered, the forcible denuda- tion of their ancestral faith humiliated them the most. The result- ant alienation became a part of their psyche.

When, added to that, their own people denied them their usual place in society, and excommunicated them for no fault of theirs, they felt betrayed and tricked. A secret anger, rankled within their personality, and out of sheer frustration they thought it best to tear the fraudulent fabric of a mindless social body.

Added to that humiliation they confronted another, and more intense kind of degradation. It was a degradation pointedly stigmatised with pouring sneer and scorn.

Their erstwhile relatives, brothers and comrades, who were more lucky, and who could with some degree of stratagem manage to save their identity, honour, and most importantly their faith, played now a most cynically high and mighty cruel

role. They played as the 'chosen of the gods', and moved with an air of snobbish superiority. A mother could not come back to her son, a brother to a brother, or a sister, nor a wife to a husband. Infants were torn away from milk-charged nipples, and the lame and blind from their supports. Indeed to these miserable blood brothers and compatriots the raped, the ravaged and the converted appeared more foreign than the foreigners, more despicable than the most despised. They played the purer, the cleaner, the higher and the cleverer. And these heartless lot considered the unfortunate victims of circumstance being 'lower', inferior to them.

They became the condemned, the untouchable. They were declared as totally unfit for fraternisation. Interdining and intermarriage with them amounted to irreparable social degradation and certain excommunication. Even the slightest gesture of compromise in this regard was frowned upon with cold disregard, degrading sneer, and even permanent rejection.

This was carrying orthodoxy and fundamentalism to inhuman limits. Neither the country, nor its religious interests appears to have gained by this suicidal strategy.

Indeed it was quite natural for the despised outcastes to get them- selves organised into a separate community and put up a combined strong and well knit front.

Indeed they showed up as belonging to the rather exalted race of the conquerors. In that seize they even, in certain cases, felt superior to the fundamentalists, and formed a stronger 'brotherhood of royal favourites'.

Hindu India thus stood divided into two partisan social structures.

The pristine Hindu world and its solidity stood stunned, divided, and forever thrown into a complex.

Upto this day the complex has foxed all attempts to bring together blood brethren of a community to live as one. Making the Hindus and the converts from Hinduism live together as brothers of the same parent-tree has been the dream of social reformers. But the cancer has run so deep into the social fabric that all reformers and political thinkers stand baffled before the Himalayan wall. Long frustrated centuries of attempts made by saints, seers, politicians and reformers stand important against an irreconcilable social distress.

Indeed the economic disaster that swept over the community of the discarded struck them as a thunderbolt. Although they held on to their ancestral trades and guilds, they were no match for the well knit commune of Hindu financiers, traders and landlords.

By compromising with the tyrannical victors, eventually they had succeeded to carve out for themselves a very strong and viable posi- tion. By virtue of sly and clever manipulations the bourgeoisie kept their interests well secured, while the position of the converted crafts- men became gradually more and more untenable. Like a sticky paste running along the border lines of the more substantial majority community, the survival of the converts, to a very considerable ex- tent, depended on the guild laws imposed on them by the same tyrannical majority-community. Nationally speaking this was suicidal.

The converts, except in a very few cases, generally belonged to small time craft dealers and impoverished artisans. They were de- pendent for their survival on the benefice and cooperation

of the moneyed and flourishing Hindu community. After conversion, and after all the readjustments of the society in turmoil, the former bonds that held the craftsmen and the traders together were found lam- entably and unjustly snapped.

The converts suffered economically from a kind of silent negation and segregation. Consequently that bespoiled section of the same society remained permanently handicapped and exploited. (The grouse, now grown almost atavistic, still persists.)

That broken limb, still sticking to the body, instead of being repaired, healed and vitalised as an indispensable part of the whole, was reduced to becoming a drag; thus inflicting on the social life of India a permanent source of sorrow, and mistrust.

But they waited for their opportunity, which they knew, by the common law of history, was bound to smile on them.

X

Before this kind of a major disruption the Hindu world lay decrepit, demoralised, bemused and bewildered. When the beleaguered society was pounced upon from behind by further attacks from aliens, the new social grouping of disgruntled converts challenged it in every way.

Confronted by the unprecedented technique of this ferocious attack, where loot and destruction added to destruction and loot was the only driving motive, an added incentive like conversion to a supposedly 'only faith', shocked and demoralised the supposedly strong Hindu social structure. The utterly confused and strangled mass staggered and melted away in ignominious disarray.

It appears futile to resist this murderous frenzy for more and yet more treasures. Molestation and abduction added spice to the hor- rors of that novel technique.

Yet in defeat too the Hindu valour did not hesitate to sacrifice its ultimate. Even when they suffered an eclipse, they tried to save their faith at the dearest cost of their property, women, children, some of whom they themselves got rid of.

As resistance it was futile; as sacrifice it was noble. But as wisdom it was negative. This certainly made them lose the glories of the battlefield, but it partially redeemed their claim to a degree of chau- vinistic male pride as honour.

But even at that price they could not get out of the social rut, and form a new society bound together in one brotherhood. They certainly could, if they would, crystallize into a healthy, strong and sturdy society, and put a stop to all further interventions.

They had done it before at the time of the Greek and the Scythian attacks; again at the time of the Kusanas and the Hūnas. They knew how to absorb and reorient a temporary social disorder. Devalasmṛti had prescribed the way.

It is inexplicable why and how this kind of negative thinking put the values of conservation above the healthy values of assimilation, and put petty-fogging selfishness above a valuable common weal.

A social malaise seemed to have overwhelmed the great Bharatavarsa. Before the new attack came from the English-Seas, the social fabric of India had forever been rent in two. And it has remained ever- since, although the texture of the

fabric, surprisingly, has held on in spirit. Spiritually India still remains one.

Those who had been caught between total destruction and total humiliation embraced the faith of the conquerors. Those who man- aged to save their skin out of this catastrophic change, and those who could not escape conversion, both suffered socially, economically and culturally. The Indian subcontinent, specially its secured Hindu glory, never knew the welcome peace of toleration and coexistence again. (Did it ever enjoy this political solidity?)

Of those who suffered the most through this deadly combat were the workers, both the converts and the non-converts. This category, consisting of the proletariat, fishers, boatmen, craftsmen, weavers, singers, musicians, masons, leatherers, shoe-makers, water-carriers, household-servants, slaves, and lastly, those left-overs of a heartless religious institution, namely, the temple-girls, who pro- vided the gods that-may-be a pleasant gay time with their soul and body, beauty and skill.

These wretched women entertainers, accomplished in art, skill and charm, (mostly belonging originally to the upper and middle classes), fell like nine pins before the sex-hungry soldiers of for- tune, and suffered helpless conversion. Soon they got detached from the active body of the conservative Hindu society, and, like birds deprived of their nest, became victims of every passing wind.

Yet they retained the easy temptation and attraction of their arts, and they continued to radiate their primal sexual charm on those who sought it. They enjoyed thus an uneasy respite from

blood and rape, and gradually nursed up a dependable clientele. But the en- forced and unjust social segregation stuck to the poor girls, who, deprived of their exclusive ranking, survived as a new community.

Of course they, who had been attached to the great temple over the ages, could not have changed their residential premises so eas- ily after the horrible devastations caused by the aliens.

They refused to get scattered and held together, as such a commune usually does. And by holding together they remained firmly possessed of their residential locality, close to the temple environs, now known as Dalmaṇḍi. In fact the present Red District formed a part of the Great Temple Complex, where the 'temple-girls' invariably enjoyed the liberty of their special quarters.

Dalmandi no longer sells 'dal' or lentils. The area of the residences had extended over the 'mandi', or market, which has today turned into the most popular market for the fancy goods, specially of foreign make.

The upshot of these tragic events was the creation of an area of easy flesh-market in replacement of a locality of those specially trained girls of both high and ordinary families who, for reasons of faith and devotion (much like the convents of Christianity, or the sangharama of Buddhism) had been dedicated to the service of the gods by their unsuspecting devout parents.

Those unfortunate females, most of whom were 'gifts' from high and prosperous, but devout families, in course of time, inevitably, grew old and sick. Eventually these were rendered 'useless'. Having nowhere to go, these old and decrepit ones too were forcefully con- verted. Some of these must have found it

profitable and safe to accept a new life with a new faith, and claim protection from stronger arms, or from their younger daughters and cousins.

They must have been deeply consoled within, however, by a streak of cynically wishful thinking that if the gods had failed, perhaps men could prove to be more protective. At least their cousins in trade extended some protection to them.

The reality and immensity of the tragedy left its indelible mark on the map of Varanasi-society (and following the example of Varanasi, on other cities of India as well). Around the temple area a permanent 'village of women' and their camp followers got thus settled. A new market of women of easy virtues eversince carries on a trade of sorts within the hub of the busy township.

Naturally here cropped up the flourishing society of the oldest of the traders. And age by age the inmates of this locality came to be known as the most renowned classical singers and entertainers of the Indian milieu.'

Of course this should explain the puzzle why around the demolished temple area of Varanasi stands to this day the Red District of the city, and why at all around this area there are flourishing shops that cater for finer and more delicate tastes and susceptibilities like music, perfumes, brocades, silk, gold, jewellery, tinsels, furniture, paintings etc., all pertaining to an excess of life-vivre like interior decoration, marbles, statuaries.

In other words the very existence of this area within the ancient Temple Complex of Visvanatha, which Hiüen Tsang had seen and admired, points out towards the miseries of a family of our sister- hood who had dedicated their lives to their gods. We

have cynically watched them gradually and inexorably exploited, and fall a victim to monsters. Vultures of social discrimination finding no courage to come to their aid, abandoned them forever.

The temple complex was extensive enough to contain gardens and tanks, walks and subsidiary temples, quarters for priests and teachers, hostels for students, and houses for the temple attendants inclusive of the dancing girls attached to the Great Temple.

So when this complex went to pieces, the social fabric that flourished around the temple also went to pieces.

All have gone down the Ganga, but not the Red District of Anyway Varanasi courtesans were famous for their art even in the classical times of the Mauryas and Guptas. Cf., Kuttanimatam, Mṛcchakatikam, and the Bana-plays.

Varanasi, a sad reminder of the glorious days when to the

temple was brought as pious dedication the flowering blossom of the Hindu community, their virgin daughters, as life-long servants of the di- vine.

We shall have to come back to this topic for a greater analysis, but against a clearer perspective.

9

Rudravasa

I

The battle of Kasi-Kosala must have continued for over five hun- dred years (c. 655-1155). We know that during the Kusaṇas, the Guptas, the Puşyabhūtis (Thaneswara) and the Pratihara dynasties (c. 106-1018) Kasi and Sarnath received a number of royal grants, as well as popular support. The 'grants' could not have referred to Varanasi, because Varanasi lands could not be 'gifted', or for that matter accepted, since Varanasi belonged to Siva (the Siva-people) and was regarded as an exclusive resort for the 'Sivas', or 'Siva-ganas'. Land- occupation in Varanasi was full of dangerous hazards.

Despite the fact that the Pala and the Senas were Saiva rulers, they made large donations and endowments to the Jaina and the Buddhist temples of Sarnath. It is remarkable that no such endow- ment from the Palas, or Senas for Hindu temples are on record.

Although a number of monasteries had been raised, and although a number of stupas and temples were built and adorned with sculptured deities, there is no evidence that the Varanasi hills had received any Jaina or Buddhist endowment. The Rudravasa was an area which even they had left alone. This perhaps was due to the reputation Varanasi had traditionally maintained about its primor- dial Kapalika-Bhairava Gaṇas. The extreme Vira-Aghora-Tantras did not suit the Saivas of Bengal. Even in Dalmanḍi to this day in the midst of the crowded market there still exists, an 'Aghori Takia'.

Varanasi proper, would not have ordinarily cared much for architectural or sculptural embellishments. True to the Bhairava- Aghora traditions, no temple, no zoomorphic or

anthropomorphic representation of deities had adorned the woods of Varanasi. The only tolerated form was the iconic lingam. Formal deities and temples seem to have been introduced in the post-Scythian era, specially during the 1200 odd years of the Pratiharas, Palas, Senas and the Gahadavalas, specially the last.

But these temple building activities appear to have been restricted to the area in the neighbourhood of Macchodari and Mandakini bordering the southern banks of the Varana.

Although the Harappan culture presents evidences of both zoo-morphic and anthropomorphic forms of (probable) deities, Hinduism as such had not yet evinced any particular taste for carved images.

Since Varanasi predates in Indian history, (even predating the Harappan culture), and since the autochthons of Varanasi definitely predates Brahmanical Aryanism, the question of the presence of carved deities in Varanasi along those dates would most likely be of a hypothetical nature.

From scriptural evidences and other records we come to visual-ise Varanasi as a wooded resort for yogis and scholars. They carried their pursuits in peaceful arboreal retreats filled with caves, grot- toes and bowers.

These early people (probably of Harappan traditions), the Nagas, Gaṇas, also known as Mahesvara-Kapalikas, loved to live close to Nature. They had evolved a spiritual life in which nature, nymphs and essential mysticism played a thoroughly mesmerising role.

The entire setting leads one to believe that the place was ideally suited for cultivation and promotion of the age-old Tantric pur-

suits, myths and mysticism. The milieu is best described as Tantra, the traditional mode of a spiritual quest entirely different from the Vedic mode of such a quest.

Varanasi appears to have been an established Tantra-centre. Here Tantra was being practised in accordance with all the three conventional Tantra-srotas. Savacara, Viracara and Sivacara, which respectively followed the tamasika, rajasika and sattvika propensities of human nature.

The native and primordial appeals of food, sex, progenitation and crop-raising did indeed have their usual hold on these Tantrics. This led them to stick together. But, by and large, they had been in search of answers to the nagging questions on the Wonder that was Life.

The dark mystery of Death too concerned them. Death, and after-Death. Death dropped a sudden but sure curtain on the living drama. Man felt helpless before the dumb catastrophe. This kind of helplessness leads Man to God and prayer. Thus, to the viewers, Death was not only a chastiser, it was also a reformer.

The phenomenon of Death made them pray. Loss of food, rain, crops made them pray. These primordial dwellers of the hills knew that Siva's drum plays both ways. They might not have been gifted like the Vedic seers in composing great rcas (verses), but undoubtedly they had been the navigators of the sublime ocean of the Mystery of Life and Death.

The search for an answer to that mystery, however, could not make them forget yet another nagging demand, food i.e., of crop- raising, of the virtues of labour and its fruit.

Tantra is downright, practical, rural, primitive. It is pre-Aryanist. The most prominent of the non-Aryan communes given to this pri- mordial kind of thinking were known as Ganas, Yaksas, Gandhar- vas, Kinnaras, Guhyakas, Kapalas, Sivas, Aghoras, etc. Varanasi was a centre for them.

Hence the gods these simple folks addressed themselves to had been equally primordial: earth and rain, rivers and trees, grottoes and springs, rocks and self, love and sex, and the charms of the human body. Above all, the dormant insistent power underlying the pull of sex, which subjects life, to irresistible chained reactions, unhinging the body and the mind, irresistibly drew them into the investigations of the relationship that binds a mind to a mind, and a body to another body. They found it of utmost importance to recognise, and utilise the fascinating powers of hunger and love with- out falling a prey to their devastating fury.

Power, The consequences of not recognising the might of this and the ruinous results of not appreciating its potential dynamism, prompted them to image its furious aspects in terrifying forms. The Tibetans conceived of the form of Yamantaka, and the Gita conceives of this as 'Kala' (ch. XI).

The mother is a lover, a companion, a prolific hydraheaded 'pro- ducer'. She is a restorer, a reviver, a multiplier.

But the Mother is also Terrible.

This Positive Power of the Female-Factor, the Mother, worked within the human body, as it worked within the many bodies moving around.

They believed that the mission of understanding and utilising that power has to be started here and now.

So they thought. Tantra has always been deeply interested in the body. The Tantrics were concerned with 'here and now'. To them the Earth and the Sky are providers, and the body is the shrine of the Spirit Unknown. Experience and experimental findings, not more surface speculation, interested them. They devoted themselves to water as water, life as life, death as death, man as man and woman as woman. All of these had special purposes to serve here and now. What was that purpose?

Few of us, investigators, have been honest to ourselves as to decide upon the earliest pre-Aryan residents of the hills of Varanasi. The Puranas refer to the sustained Deva-Gana feuds. The Ganas included stalwarts like Puspadanta, Kalabhairava, Virabhadra, the Pisaca of Pisacamocana or even Siva himself as the Kapalika bearing the curse of the Brahma-Kapara, which he had acquired from his crime of depriving Brahma of his fifth head. We have to attest those terrible incidents against a plausible historical perspective. No inci- dent in a Purana is without a historical basis.

There could be no doubt that prior to the Aryan onslaught on the hills of Varanasi this secluded region was naturally inhabited by some people, some, who were found despicable, unacceptable to a self-styled 'superior' race, and therefore, in their elite judgment, worthy of extermination. And the long history of the fights of the Devas to exterminate the Asuras, or Dasyus (Dasas), corroborate such a possibility.

The feuds as scholars know, ended up in a fiasco. Compromise was the only way out. Mutual understanding of problems and a healthy decision for coexistence have their own virtue. This virtue they realised. Manikarnika, the Ganesa shrines of Saksivinayaka, Dhunḍiraja, Danḍapaṇi etc., and such names as

Pisacamocana, Kapalamocana, Batuka Bhairava, Aghori Takia etc., keep us re- minded of the ancient residents of Varanasi, as well as of the virtues of coexistence.

The shrines of Ganapati-s, Bhairava-s and Surya-s (Sun) in Vara- nasi, besides its down-to-earth proletariat Bir shrines, remind us again and again of these acutely troubled times.

In this context scholars would like to consider a most vexed question. Would one notice in this society any fal out from the harappan culture? Do the cults of pasupati and the lingam, flourishing on and around the hills of Varanasi, send us any special message. Is it a plausible hypothesis to infer that the special tribes engaged for building, the city of Varanasi for Visvesvara, as noted in the K. Kh., were no other than the Harappan architects? Or, is it too much to infer that the very people who had originally been settled in the hill resort of Rudravasa must have had connections with the pre-Aryan Harappans, or Dravids, or both?

These would appear to have been a people who concentrated on the values of the spiritual forces of a vivacious life, as different from those aristocrat Aryan ways of yajnas loaded by meats of sorts, soaked in butter, and celebrated through eating and drinking (cf. Arjuna- Kirata showdown in Mbh.).

The Aryan way of classified discriminative order would have filled the spiritual consciousness of the earlier inhabitants of Rudravasa with disgust, and remonstrance.

These autochthons of the holy hills were filled with the life-vivre and élan. Their natural life was dedicated to the appreciation of and meditation on the frank beauties of Life and Nature. They longed to live in the fullness of the Life-Spirit

which revealed itself in Nature and Man. A frank acceptance of the facts of life, for them, cleansed the troubled soul of avoidable complexes, and led to liberation much faster.

The two ways were as contradictory as contradictions would go. And this was recorded through constant confrontations, at times violent and bloody.

The sublime function called 'life' included for those early settlers the phenomenon of death too; they also found that the phenomenon of life contained also the strange phenomenon of love, of which sex is just an expression, - a vital expression. They had observed the fact that flowers contained beauty, as much as they contained fruits. They appreciated and valued the female's power of reproduction and multiplication, and for this great contribution they held the female in awe and regard, and appreciated the value of the Female Factor.

They observed that the body of the woman, in its turn, blossomed into a mystically fascinating dynamo. The civilised of today try to explain that mystery in terms of libido, procreation, creation, as well as ecstasy.

Ecstasy in creation is the finale of sublimity. They held on to this truth as a religion.

In his eloquently fluent and sublime psalm, Lalitasṭaka-

Ratnam, sage Durvasa (supposed to be a non-uterian son of Siva), sings of this power of libido, and calls the Power 'Mother Lalita, the Ten- der'. Even an uninitiated would feel the charms of this poem, as the more dedicated expert would experience the abstract thrills of sublimity in Adi Sankara's Saundaryalahari.

Both the psalms sing of the sublime nobility of the Female-Factor. In the eyes of those seers, and their likes, death and life, as two points in a circular motion coterminate at one zero point, not signifying which is the beginning, and which the end.

This continual process of ending at the beginning, and merging the beginning in the end has been imaged in the ideograms of Mahakala and Lalita, or Om and Hring. It is a perpetual process best described by a serpent swallowing its own tail. This perpetual process projects onto the apparently flitting word phenomenon elements of tangibility, logicality, purposiveness and confidence.

An ancient plaque fixed against the old walls of a neglected temple in Chotanagpur forest illustrates a ring of two snakes, one swal- lowing the tail of another. This represents in a symbolic way the primitive concept about the perpetuity of Time. When time ends, Time begins. Time is Motion-in-stillness with the property of perpetuity.

Bhutagrama sa evayam bhutva bhutva praliyate.-Gita

The end is for the beginning, and the beginning is for the end.

Neither is without purpose. The function is the Law, its own Law. Endless and unfathomable is the mystery of perpetuity. The phenomenon is filled with thrill, yet it remains beyond the common human understanding. Seers called such revelations as spanda (thrill); prakasa (light).

Hence the holy ground where this truth was revealed was known as Kasi (the Hermitage of Light). And the naming of the holy ground as Kasi refers to its power of revelation and enlightenment. Kasi has been designed as a female deity.

Here emotions reach a halt. Self's individualism transcends the person. The world phenomenon ascends a transformed realism.

III

Those pre-Aryan original inhabitants of Varanasi, cultivated the art of living as nature expects life to live, having very little to do with any kind of sophistication. They were voluptuaries without being given to lust. (This is a very difficult exercise.)

They loved to live with a determined disregard against imposed fetters of form, sham, fraud, religious humbugs or social refinements. The discerning could still read traces of these traits in the behaviour patterns of the rag-tag rubbles of Uttara Kosala, i.e., the people of Ayodhya-Mathura, and particularly of Varanasi, who are 'famed' for their Rabelaisian broadness and, who still keep up a rough-and- ready attitude towards life. They felt free, lived free, thought free, and reached a degree of unattached pure consciousness. To their vision the wings of duality skimmed the immemorial blues of Truth. They could mix poise with abandonment, rules with freedom, and worship with the fullness of a vigorous life-style.

They preferred to look at nature free in the face, and meet Truth in sheer nudity without the least cover. Truth, they believed, must stand free without any embellishment to its natural grandeur, fierce in its punishment, but ultimately kindly and benevolent in its favour.

These devotees of the woods, rocks and rivers moulded the rhyth- mic thrill of the body into a pain of joy-in-devotion. The joy of the body to them was an expression of the sublime joy of the Cosmic mission of Creation.

To be able to reach the pinnacle of joy through the instrumentality of the body, without belonging to the body, was for them the peak of spiritual achievement.

They were the Sadasivas, the Sambhus, the infants on the lap of the Mother who plays. Thus the trees and the groves, the caves and the dells, the streams and the lakes were of much greater importance to them. These for them were the media for reaching the Ultimate. They cared for no reward-awarding sacrifices enjoined by learned professors. They cared even less for raising the tall towers of bricks and stones, gold and silver, wherein they would imprison their carved handmade gods and goddesses. Temples, chaityas, im- ages and learned words were not for them. They were stark people, with carvings; and they appealed to the stark gods to answer their demands.

Surprisingly, that God worked for them.

IV

The Varanasi-forest, the Anandakananam was an exclusive place for seekers after the mystery of joy and pain, life and death. It pro- vided to its inmates a mother's shelter and a woman's companion- ship. 'Everything, everyone, in their place, and according to their value',-that's how they thought, lived and worshipped.

Their liberation came from opening up a million windows provided by Nature, and let the free breeze lift the body-bound spirit to heights, so that to their changed vision the world would look ex- tremely tiny, an almost nonexistent speck, against the cosmic un- fathomable incomprehensible vastness. (Rahasyam hyetaduttamam 'A super-mystery this'.-Gita)

The straight and unabashed path they followed was known as the Siva way. It leads, straight to the Mother's sheltered security. This was their dharma, their faith and practice. It was an out-of-the-way path of non-fear, non-obsession, an inside out march to freedom and ecstasy.

In such a society there was no need for any temple, chaitya, deities, manmade edifices, packs of priests, or chains of observances prescribed by books and books. This special way of the Sivas did not need special donations and offering of virgins from the devotee to keep the deity pleased. The Female-factor for them was not for lust and indulgence, but for totally revered participation. They felt that lust of gods was none the less lust indeed.

In the ancient days, to start with, Rudravasa had no temple-clapped gods, or, even sanctified firthas (ablutionary water-fronts), where a sinner could wash away his guilt.

Until gods like Skanda, Brahmins like Agastya, and sages like Durvasa (all mentioned in the K. Kh.) had started to establish the different values of the holy spots, the inner greatness and nobility of Rudravasa had remained a closed secret to the proud Aryans. For them only 'Bhutas and Pretas reigned in the mysterious forests.'

V

This non-Aryan community avoided the Varanã and its valleys. They stuck to the Rudravasa, Anandakananam, i.e., the range of the hills along the Ganga.

The new people who came with their superior culture began their expansion from the north of the Varanã and came upto the central hill, where on the peak they established their temples.

When Hiüen Tsang visited, he found Buddhist shrines nearby. The Jainas had their shrines at the confluence of the Varana and Ganga.

The core of Rudravasa and its Western environs were kept out of bounds of the 'decent people'. A cautious line of demarcation has been respected eversince. Even upto the end of the eighteenth century the forested marshy area to the West of the central hills was studiously avoided by the 'civilised' section of the public.

The development of this area started as late as the middle of the eighteenth century. (Even at the beginning of the present century this area was regarded as the wildest part of Varanasi. The construc- tion of a university and of the Bengalitola neighbourhood effected for the first time a change in the situation.)

The situation along the Western marshy expansions along the foothills was different. There were many large reservoirs of water, known as pokhara, taḍaga, talão, kunda, etc., the most famous of these were Revatitaḍaga, or Ramkunda, Panditalão, Laksmikunda, Pitṛkunda, Valmiki- kunda, Misirpokhara, Pisacamocana, Matṛkunda, Lahariatalão, etc. The people who lived around, and considered the waters holy were the locals, branches of the ancient Nagas and Bhara-Sivas.

The sophistication of religious rites of the Aryans had not penetrated these parts. Mostly the original non-Aryan communities stick- ing to a form of 'Animism' and Tantra lived around, and practised mystic rites, charms and magic.

For the colonisers from the north-eastern regions, who came to Varanasi after crossing the Varanã, these parts of the hills, and

the woody western valleys, were filled with 'spirits of terror'. The only shrine in Varanasi where blood sacrifice still takes place is situated here. Hereabout in a forest the Saint Goswami Tulsidasa had taken shelter from the attacking Brahmins to complete his famous Rama-caritamanasa.

In a way the picture substantiates our thesis. The hills sheltered followers of a cult which has been called the Pasupati cult, (cf. Sir John Marshall, Aurel Stein, R.D. Banerji, Heinrich Zimmer, D.D. Kosambi, A.L. Basham) and who in all probability, belonged to the Harappan syndrome.

But the demarcation itself might have induced aggression. The belligerency of the Aryan thrust soon overwhelmed the hills. And the number of resultant bloody battles have been recorded in several incidents described in K. Kh., Agni P., Vayu P., Markandeya P., even Mbh. we make mention of a few of these characteristic feuds.

One, the anecdote of the feud started by the proud Aryan Chief Daksa against Siva Pasupati; two, the incident of the Devas supplicating Siva's powers to save them from the devastating poison exuded by the combined hatred of their erstwhile cousins the Asuras; three, the anecdote of Siva's scouts locating the hills as a safer abode for Siva-Sakti union, and private dalliance 'away from the common eye' (K. Kh., XXVI); and lastly, the series of incidents involving the fights and fisticuffs between the hordes of the Ganas, Pretas, Pisacas, Bhutas, etc. on one side, and the forces of the Devas on the other.

Anthropological social compulsions, laws of contiguity and syncretism, forced the advancing Aryans eventually to raid and

occupy Anandakananam too. The spiritual fame of the hills and the holy shrines ultimately prevailed on their discretions.

Expansionism has always been an inner itch from which the Aryan blood suffered. The Kasi-Kosala settlers had been trying for centu- ries to occupy and settle on these lovely hills.

VI

So ancient was this tradition of utilising the hills as a quiet retreat for meditation, and so many generation of pious souls had been practising meditation here, that every waterpool, river-front, stream- head and confluence, why, even the most insignificant grotto, cave, mound, hedge, park, tank, lake was stamped as a consecrated 'holy spot' through years and years of association with this or that scholar, sage or saint. Varanasi, more than Rome, Mecca, Jerusalem, Londres or Cyprus is still crowded with very ancient and reputedly effective pilgrim sites. Most of these sites are Saiva, and Gana-influenced.

Words had gone out that all the rocks of Rudravasa, now called

Varanasi, are as holy as Siva himself. The sands of Varanasi, the devout claim, are charged with 'magnetic spiritualism'.

Varanasi, its very dust was golden dust; the very pebbles were divine; the least drop of water here was manna and nectar. 'Even curs and swines of Varanasi who crowd around its garbage or the turtles and the fish in its river' were believed to have lived a life enviable to one who still longs to be there.

All who sought mokşa (Ultimate Emancipation), desired to live by the river. If not in youth, at least in matured years, when the twilight shades push back the far away further away, and when the overtaking shadows loom longer and mystifying, a craving

for the banks of Varanasi unsettles the mind of any 'departing' Hindu.

To them Varanasi appears to be the last hill-top to catch the beck- oning lights from the unchartered Beyond. It opens for the condemned and the wretched wide gates to the hope-lit Golden Gate to peace, from where the soul in agony would never be made to return.

VII

The imagery brings before the mind yet another significant point in distinguishing the Vedic view of life-and-death from the view of the indigenous Ganas on the same subject. This concerns the much debated idea of the 'life after', as well as the controversial reincar- nation syndrome.

This idea, so dear to the Hindus, does not appear to have bothered the Vedics much. Of course Atharvaveda admits of a process of disposal of the dead. It refers to the passing away of the unbodied soul seeking peace and redemption, as also a final accommodation with the pity-s. In the Asvalayana Grhyasutra, Agni has been conceived as a powerful bird, who carries on his strong wings the redeemed souls, and finally reaches them to the loka of the pitrs. Atharvaveda describes pits as immortals (VI.41.3; VII.76.4; X.56.4).

Pity-s, as great as the devatas, the Veda insists, created the flush of the daylight, and the darkness that brings in the night. Pits are also responsible for introducing Usas, the colourful Dawn.

The very idea of preta and glorification of souls, and of going through special rites for the emancipation and pacification of individual souls, does not bear the stamp of the Vedic. The preta-kytyas (ceremonial prayers for the peace of the departed)

have always been regarded as a special feature of the culture of aborigines throughout the world.

It has been a feature of the primitives all over the world to enter-
tain a concept of the outer world. Their erstwhile dear ones in a new world, they believed, would invariably be in the need of the many accessories held dear and essential to them while they had been alive.

Right or wrong, to this idea civilisation owes much for preserva- tion and supply of valuable information regarding the patterns of lives that the ancients had lived. Many forgotten and lost cultures come alive through the store-house of burial grounds.

But the idea does not appear to have cast a strong impression on the Rgvedic people. If in the Atharvan we meet with this idea, we also know that the Atharvaveda was admitted to the group of the other three-Vedas (Trayi) much later. Ancestor-worship is indeed a very late admission to the 'Hindu' system of prayers. With the aborigi- nes it was regarded as the first duty and obligation of life to death.

In the Bhagavadgita, which is regarded to be of a much later date, coming and goings of the soul have found mention (VIII.15-16, 19, 26; IX.3, 21). It specifically mentions that the destiny of the embod- ied soul is guided by the shades of thoughts which had been bother- ing the mind of the departing at the last moment (Gita, VIII.5-6).

Reincarnation, prayers for the dead, sraddha, pinda and Brah-
mana-feeding along with the virtues of making gifts, all proceed from such a concept.

For a full-fledged support of the after-death ceremonies we have to wait till the days of the Visnu Bhagavata, Varaha, Garuda, and Brahmavaivarta Puraṇas (first century-eleventh century AD). The ref- erences to preta (as distinct from the pity- s), pinda etc., in the Epics have been explained by experts as priestly interpolations.

In any case the introduction of the aboriginal preta-concept of the Gana-Bhútas into the Aryan mainstream as a process has been of a much earlier date than Vyasa-s or Valmiki-s, or the Pururava-s- Yayati-Mandhata-Nahusa-Iksvaku clans.

The idea of remembering and honouring the dead, the anxiety to provide the departing with means of comfort was one of the chief characteristics of the primitive social system. Hence the importance of Varanasi (as a safety valve) to this neo-social aberration.

The importance of Varanasi has been closely related to its reputation of Mahasmasana, and to its being accepted as a sure bet for instant release from bonds of reincarnation. These, obviously are pre-Vedic doctrines. With the acceptance of these doctrines the Aryan immigrants made it easy for them to be admitted to the Mahasmasana syndrome.

This offers yet another 'proof of the original occupation of Varanasi by non-Aryan autochthons.

Varanasi has always been projected as a holy place. Indeed Varanasi is the holy of holies, a superlative place for breathing last, and setting sails for a voyage to Eternity.

Death here automatically promotes the soul to the category of the blessed and the pure. As such, the suffering soul would not have to look forward to any special ceremonial intervention by

Brahmanical deeds. The 'natives' did not want any Brahmanical exploitation on the issue of Death in Varanasi.

This unique attitude to 'life-after-death', which predominates the Varanasi psyche understandably casts a special emphasis on the emancipated life-style of the holy hills. It indicates the pre-Vedic nature of the culture of Rudravasa where pre-Aryan beliefs held a strong sway.

If further proof for a pre-Aryan root of the importance of Varanasi were needed, importance of this holy ground as a ground for final liberation, and of the special funeral rites would offer yet another proof.

The dusts of Varanasi preserve the earthly ashes of innumerable saints and sages who have passed through its misty lanes, and who have bathed in its holy waters over the hoary centuries. Spiritualism appears to be an ingredient of the breath of Varanasi.

Whereas the elaborate ancestral worship betrays the past of Rudravasa, it establishes its much more ancient pre-Vedic culture when we find that pretas, not pity-s were respected by the tribes and the Ganas.

Both the preta (intermediary souls) and the pitr- (Manes) concepts dominate the Varanasi life. Whereas, the former refers to the Rgvedic culture, the latter refers to the culture of the primordial community for whom Varanasi was an ancestral home.

VII

In Varanasi no structures were raised, no holy firthas were inducted in the name of the Vedic deities. Varuna, Agni, Yama,

Indra, Matarisva, the Asvins, or Nasatyas, even Soma was not honoured by any structural remembrance. If perchance any such did reflect on the Varanasi map, the Vedic deity had to be 'transformed' into a linga form, and worshipped e.g., Somesvara, Sukresvara, Dhruvesvara etc.

Only Rudras, and the Ganas of Rudra, and of course the alter ego Devi herself with the Bhütas formed a well knit family that mattered with the early worshippers in Varanasi.

One of the names of Varanasi, as well known, is Rudravasa (abode of Rudra). Together with Mahasmasana it describes almost all of the ancient pre-Vedic culture of Varanasi. Rudra's alter ego, Bhavani was also known as Visala/Lalita/Tripuresvari/Visalaksi. The two chief deities, Rudra and Sakti, together with their guards and attendants (Ganesa-s, Bhairava-s), occupy the most revered and the most im- portant shrines of the holy city.

But these never required any edifices. In fact these were mostly accommodated under trees, on street crossings, near water reservoirs or springs, and peaks of hills and mounds.

We shall observe later that most of the ancient pilgrim-sites of Varanasi belong to these entirely open and natural surroundings where no human frailties such as pride, power, pomp or glory had any chance of being ostentatiously displayed.

And what was actually the shape of the primitive deities? Any carved form? Probably none. Practically none. No splendid model of sculptural fame honoured these natural spots. No images of any ana- tomical, or artistic excellence. The iconic linga-stones, the pillar- shaped 'Vir' forms apart, bulls as Nandi-

s, or snakes as Naga-s were allowed to receive the common man's homage.

Earliest instances of anthropomorphic art-images have been pro- vided by the post-Scythian urge for modelling the Bodhisattvas in the pattern of Gandhara art.

So dramatic, emotive and eloquent was the impact of these Graeco-Scythian forms, which in fact were novel to the subjective symbolic representations popular in India, that the populace, al- ready familiar to the Harappan experience, at once adopted avidly the novelty. Some of the foreign scholars have not hesitated to identify Siva as a form a Dionysus or Heracles; or Visnu as Jupiter, and of course the Sun-god as Apollo himself.

Greeks and Romans were mainly patriarchals. They did not care much for models of Devi or Sakti as the Mother. The utmost they could conceive of along that line was a Venus, a Juno, an Aphrodite, a Minerva, more known for lasciviousness than for the motherly appeal dear to the matriarchal people of the subcontinent.

The ancient Rudravasa bypassed all these jungles of images and forms. Rudravasa was strictly pre-Vedic, primordial and basic. Its psyche felt at home with the linga-patta combine.

The Rudra-Siva worshippers of the hills were accustomed to kneel before Nature and nature phenomena. They were a sect of animists. A rock, a pebble, or may be a grotto, a spring, a stream attracted their attention for spiritual adoration, leading to abstract meditation.

Primitive images of Siva consisted of a circular flat, at the centre. of which stood a comical stone-symbol which assisted

the devotees to concentrate and contemplate on the mysteries of creation and dissolution. There is a 'centre', and a circle moves around 'perenni- ally', but the centre is firm, and never moves.

The tiny atom contains within its embryo the first vibrant spark of energy that sets creation on to further evolvement. Much in the same chain of thought, though crudely, this image of a solid conical mound set at the centre of a circular, or triangular 'field' of energy, devoutly projected in their mind the message of the mystery of life and death, creation and dissolution, emergence and void, phallus and vulva, which at that point of time appeared to them as a mystified area of the Life-Process.

This in short contains the idea of the lingam and the pattam.

The ideogrammatic appeal of this form overwhelms the mind of the Siva- worshipper, because to him the figure transmits the mystic concept of the perpetual process of material eminence from out of the wombs of cosmic embryo. The marked circle is described as the adhara of sthanu, the central dark chamber of Sakti (Power) that projects the material form (Siva). It represents the Pit that brings forth.

Unfortunately these humble ideologistic forms of mounds and circles (or triangles) representing 'the sublime cosmic ultimate about stillness holding the whirlpools of creation's hot-heat' is often mistaken, or deliberately focused as being erotic.

Along with a staid core, a circular area of dynamism, urge and potency, represented to those primordial dwellers of Rudravasa (as of all the primitive pre-Vedic India) the Sublime and Mystic secrets of the law of emergence and dissolution. This form provided them with a deity; and to this they brought their

homage of humility, gratitude and prayers. This to them was the Cause of all causes, the cosmic terminal where all ups-and- downs, negatives-and positives meet. As a tangible clue to the great mystery that Life is, that suggestive symbolism provides an answer.

These images marked their spiritual concern. Even today, with a steady regularity that amazes us, these continue to make their un- announced appearance in possible and impossible corners all over Varanasi, indeed all over India, wherever the Godhead is remembered.

A number of these concentrated spots were haloed by the association of great sages. Rivers and tanks associated with their pen- ance still retain the memory of great names, Vasistha, Gautama, Kapila, Kardama, Daksa, Durvása, Agastya, Vyasa, Markaṇḍeya, Dattatreya, etc.

But the large temples, the ostentatious godhouses of Varanasi, must have been in emulation of similar structures raised by post- Buddhist rulers such as the Guptas, Palas, Senas, Gahadavalas, etc. The new trend added novelty to the vogue of Varanasi's primordial form of Siva-worship.

Varanasi, the Mahasmasana, Rudravasa, Gauripitha, and above all the free frank Anandakananam and Avimukta had set her foot on a new age.

Rudravasa had made way for Anandakananam, and Ananda-kananam in its turn had to make way for Varanasi.

VIII

In the usual pattern of things northern India witnessed many rises and falls of empires. Northern India fought, settled,

unsettled many times in many wars, Varanasi was no exception. But the hermitage of Varanasi was generally avoided and kept alone. This was due to the tales about gnomes and evil spirits that supposedly infested the Rudravasa hills. Strong rumours about a disorderly and mystic peo- ple known for their horrible practices and fierce character deterred forced occupation. Expansionism was restricted to the banks of the Varana. Further penetration into the wooded hills was not risked.

Thus no one was ever encouraged to make Varanasi a 'home' except for those 'homeless travellers to Eternity', with their minds set for achieving in life the experience, the bliss of the unattached. These inspired people chose Varanasi as their 'Journey's end'. But for householders Varanasi was regarded to be 'out of bounds'. (K. Kh.)

In fact 'building a home' in Rudravasa, as we have noted, was considered a sacrilegious proposition for a householder precisely because no householder would love to come into conflict with the mystical unpredictable spiritual seekers who had, over immemorial centuries, carved a suitable habitual for their way of spiritual pur- suits. The idea of residing in Rudravasa, for a house-holder, was considered dangerous because of the depredations of the unpre- dictable Ganas and Bhutas. Feuds flamed up at the least provocation.

No householder would chose such an 'insecure' place, peopled with men of unpredictable habits, for their residence.

If still that 'horrible' place was at all colonised by the Vedic immi- grants, we have to take into consideration the constant clashes of the Vedic and the non-Vedics. Immigrant dynasties of rulers, from the Iksvakus to the Gahadavalas, continued to

rule Kasi-Varanasi until the last of them was defeated by Mahmud of Ghazni (1194).

Speaking of such later times, things did not improve. Tulsidasa (of Ramacaritmanasa fame) in his Vinaya Patrika has drawn a very damaging picture of Varanasi life. The excess of rowdism and dis- turbances created by unsocial elements did not encourage men to settle there.

Living in Kasi has been regarded as a risky proposition against the threats from ghost-muscle men, frauds and charlatans. This could have been a traditional extension of the supposed threats from the redoubtable Ganas and Bhûtas, known for their thorough disapproval of getting crowded out by a population whose presence could only have interfered with the simple life-style of Rudravasa.

Meanwhile the Vedic people themselves had undergone great changes from the time they had spread out from their colonies in Hapta-Sindhu, Saraswati, Brahmavarta and Kusavarta.

Their cultural patterns too had changed from the days of Yajurveda and Rgueda. The Atharvaveda, as we know, had made its ap- pearance later, and the Grhyasûtras were being compiled over and above the Brahmanas, and the Aranyakas.

Over the centuries life had changed. Habits had changed.

Rigidity and conservative protectionism gradually swept away the Saiva spirit of accommodation and acceptance. Anuloma, Pratiloma and Niyoga unions, and children from those unions, made appearances. This led to more rigid restrictions on caste divisions and social discriminations. Eight different forms of marriages, inclusive of marriage by force, were admitted within the system, when in early Vedic times marriage itself was not

rigidly enjoined for forming a family tie. Not too long ago a woman had been quite free to respond to the solicitations of an errant male (e.g., Uddalaka-Svetaketu incident: Chandogya Up., or the incident of Galava and Madhavi, or of Santanu and Ganga). Along with Daiva and Prajapatya (prearranged marriages) Asura, Gandharva and Raksasa marriages also were accepted and approved, proving thereby that encroach- ment, rape and elopement cases became too frequent to be ignored. Society learnt to accommodate. Times had changed. Siva became Deva-deva. (Cf. incident of Bhrgu-Agni and the demon Puloma.) Instances of encroachments and assimilations of one culture over another increased as time passed on. Cultures were getting synthesised.

Varanasi witnessed them all. Varanasi preserved them all. Varanasi is an Eternal City.

For instance, Atharvaveda, and partially Yajurveda recognised gradually the importance of agriculture, uses of metals and medicines, state-crafts, military preparation, house-building and civic laws. For the pure Rgvedic society this proved to be a great deviation from the past. Here is a prayer quoted from the great Atharvaveda which amply illustrates the changes affecting the social life of the Aryans who were slowly but surely becoming 'Hinduised'.

Nevertheless, the growing importance of agriculture and of met- als, is both basically Asura-non-Aryan traits. This is made very clear in a prayer (still recited), which would not have fitted into the ear- liest Rgvedic frame: "May for me... milk sap, clarified butter, honey, eating and drinking at the common table (saghi and sapiti), plough- ing, rains, conquest, victory, wealth, riches prosperity, low grade grain (ku-yava) food, freedom

from hunger, rice, barley, sesame, kidney beans, vetches, wheat, panicum lentils, millet, pancium millaceum, frumentaceum, and wild rice prosper through the sacrifice. May for me the stone, clay, hills, mountains, sand, trees, gold, bronze, lead, tin, iron, copper, fire, water, roots, plants, what grows on ploughed lands, what grows on unploughed land, tame and wild cattle (pros- per through the sacrificed yajna)." (c. 800 BC.)

The interested could still consult the same Yajurveda (XVIII. 1-20) for a number of prayers in similar strain.

The gradual transition of Varanasi (from the Mahasmasana state to the Avimukta state) reveals, besides the feuds, a great socio-cultural change. The de-classed Rudra's acceptance as Maha-deva and Deva-deva speaks a lot in favour of these changes.

The Aryan attitude too underwent great changes concurrently.

As a result the mighty religions institution known as Hinduism, a religion of acceptance, understanding and moderation, opened its arms to contain and absorb all forms of religious books.

It is difficult to believe this now. But the social law-books written over the ages go to prove the great changes that kept up this ex- panding spirit of acceptance. It stood against, and still stands against, forced, circumstantial or politically induced conversion.

A Vaisnava became a Saiva, or a Buddhist became a Tantric and vice versa because one was pleased to do so. It was more of a matter for conviction than for a matter for conversion.

It would appear that conversion is philosophically an anathema to people given to the spirit of accommodation and mutual under- standing.

A thorough appreciation of this gradual change that came over the citizens of Varanasi would enable one to get into the spirit of this eternal town which has trampled past more centuries than most of the ancient cities of the world.

(In this context the author is reminded of the fact that under the Mullah-laws in vogue in India 're-conversion' or conversion of a Muslim was punishable by death for both the respondent and the correspondent. This law did not help much the cause of assimilation and acceptance.'

10

Varanasi-theCharmer

I

The ancient Rudravasa and Anandakananam are no more. In its place what we have is Kasi-Varanasi.

Kasi-Varanasi of the Purana times claim existence even earlier. The Jatakas mention it. The Vedic sources such as Satapatha Brahmana (Videgha Madhava legend, and the legend of Sadanira) mentions Kasi (IV.1.10-17). It finds mention also in the Paippalada Sakha of Atharvaveda.

But generally the Aryans avoided the place 'as the Vedic-fire was not respected there."

Kasi finds mention, also in Kausitaki, Bṛhadaranyaka, Sankhyayana and Baudhayana Srautasutras, Satapatha Brahmana and even in Patanjali's Mahabhaşya, with the difference that instead of the name Kaši and Vedic records mention Varanavati.

This sounds quite significant for our studies. Kasi as a name of the town, even Varanasi, has been mentioned much later.

Do we not note that the very name Varanavati confirms the city's existence and expansion along the banks of the Varana river (and not along the western bank of the Ganga as we find at present).

Several irresistible inferences could be concluded from this rather disconcerting fact.

The Vedic people had been forced to avoid a settlement here, because the people around did not encourage Vedic fires to be lit around. They rejected Agnihotra altogether (Sat. Br.).

For the Vedics the city clung to the banks of the Varana, and avoided the range of the hills. The expansion of the city, and ur- banisation of the settlement progressed from the north to the south. Thus, for the city the Varana, and not the Ganga, was more important. Therefore, it appears that the name Varanasya suits more appropriately the town that had settled along the banks of the Varana. The northerly Anandakananam, or Rudravasa, covered with a forestry, had very little to do with the infant town of Varanasya, or Varanavati.

With the progress of the city, and with the influence of the Graeco- Scythians on the architecture and sculpture of the settlers, gradu- ally a set of temples and imaged deities made their appearance. The very earliest temples of Varanasya had been built along these new settlements, and rarely spilled over the central hill. This restricted area has since been held as the core of the Hindu life, and was known as the Antarvedi, or later as Visvesvarakhandam.

The earlier inhabitants of the hills, as we note in this context, were being pushed off more and more towards the south, and the west.

The Manusmyti does not mention Kasi. Does this indicate a deliberate avoidance, or neglect of the non-Aryans? An antagonism in respect of the aboriginal residents of the hills? Was this the beginning of the racial preference on the part of the Aryans for their town Videha as opposed to Varanasya? Was this at the root of the continuous feuds between the Ganas and the Devas? Videha as an Aryan colony had remained a sown antagonist of the city of Varanasi.

The Aryans found the Anandakananam there, but they were not allowed within; even their Agnihotra fires could not be lit there, so strong was the opposition. (K. Kh., Puspadanta and Dandapani, leg- ends.)

But carried on by the forces of history Varanasi continued to grow, and finally had to be recognised as a flourishing township.

According to available records it appears that the actual town-part of Varanasya was restricted to the Varana banks, which had gradually progressed up to the central hills and Jnanavapi.

Buddha refers to Kasi, and claims to have been born several times there. Mahavira had actually been born in Kasi-Varanasi. The city grown beyond recognition since the days of the Harappans.

Aryans found the hills well settled, and at once decided to take possession of the beautiful spot, if necessary by driving out the ani- mistic, ferocious, un-Vedic tribes. This they failed to achieve. (Vide K. Kh.)

The legend that the settlement stood on the exclusive trident of Siva indicates the uniqueness of the settlers and their well girted commune of spiritual seekers. They considered themselves as 'protected' beings.

So, neither the epics, nor the Puranas could point out that Varanasi had been a crowded city. On the contrary all point out that the area beyond the Mandakini and the Godavari covered with woods and watered with springs, was appropriately called the Anandakananam. It was indeed a charming hideout where the seeker could stay in peace and quiet. It was a retreat called lovingly as Rudravasa, which preceded urban Varanasi by centuries.

That Kasi too has gone. Instead of the woodland that was Anandakananam, stands before us a metamorphosed teeming city. But it still projects the confusing names of Kasi, Varanasi or Banaras.

Some other semi-historical references point out to a very long antiquity of Kasi. Puraṇas speak of a king Kasa (c. 3000 BC calculated on the basis of the Kuruksetra War). His son was 'named' Kasiraja, who, had a daughter, Gandini, who married Svaphalka of the Yadavas. Svaphalka's son Akrūra had died by the hand of Kṛsna Vasudeva in the battle against Paundra Vasudeva.

Kasi is otherwise interpreted from the root verb Kas, and offers a strictly grammatical Nirukta-explanation that Kasi is the city of 'light'. Kas meaning light, brilliance. (K. Kh., XXVIV)

Such interpretations by Purana-poets, however witty and clever, appear to be the fruits of after-thoughts.

Puranas are filled with such literary stratagems.

Be that as it may, we have this town of Kasi-Varanasi before us to play with; and with the help of this we have to locate and discover the Varanasi lost to us.

But is it possible to bring back 'the light of other days'?

Mais ou sant les neiges dantan? (But where are the snows of yester- year?), sings Villon, the rake of a poet. Swallows, finches, cuckoos and bulbuls go away to come back; and it may not be entirely impossible to reconstruct the lost Java-man (Pithecant-horpus), or the Neodarthal man putting together pieces found, and pieces calcu- lated, imagined, and reset.

But it is impossible to bring back the lost Varanasi. Yet we could try to rediscover the lost city.

By rediscovering Varanasi we perhaps, even now, could

visualise its lost grandeur, its noble layout, and re-establish the attraction of the lost Varanasi, as artifacts in museums do, in reconstructing the lost grandeur of Athens, Pompii, Knossos, Persepolis, or, Tenoch- titlan (Mexico).

For achieving the fruits of this reconstruction we have to spread out the area of our research. We have to sectionise the entire layout of the old Anandakananam.

In order to grasp the ancient gradients and facets of the place we have to soar on deliberate wings of imagination. It would be an exercise in extending the self. And the self's capacity to organise a series of reconstruction in favour of the requirements of the subject is unlimited.

Imagination, acting within the spirit of enquiry and historical reconstruction, opens up the proverbial 'third eye', and a historian could see things which the common sight misses.

We have to extend our own selves, and recapture the Varanasi that has been lost to us.

And this Varanasi, good god, was vibrant and fully alive when king Canute was ruling England, 1500 years before Canute (1030) Gautama Buddha was preaching, when the Greeks were defeating the Persians at Marathon, when in the island of Crete the Minoans had built up a dazzling culture and civilization, when the Hittites were not known, and Homer had not yet started writing.

History today is aware of many lost cities of India. Dwaraka, Ahicchatra, Kausambi, Mahismati, Avanti etc. Historians have attempted reconstruction of Nineveh, Babylon, Minos, Pompeii and Jerusalem. These have been lost forever; yet persistent historical insight have been at work to achieve a fruitful reconstruction. Men have recaptured the spirit of the time, realigned the layouts of lost links. To be able to breathe the air of the past, and live in its lost glory gives a very special satisfaction to an archaeologist.

In our case too we could employ the same urge, the same methods, and remove the objective hindrances with the aid of subjective strides into the past, and re-establish the Varanasi of which K. Kh. so eloquently and emotionally sings. Even the times of Fa-hien and Hiüen Tsang could be reconstructed ignoring the modern remodelling of a town long since demolished.

II

For our benefit K. Kh. has already sectionised the layout of Varanasi.

We could follow that with profit. Millions of devout pilgrims and visitors to Varanasi, from times immemorial, have derived benefit from how K. Kh. divides the pilgrim routes within Varanasi.

These pilgrimages in Varanasi are indeed places consecrated in the spiritual memories of great sages of the Vedic times. The com- mon woods and more common tanks and wells of Varanasi com- memorate the great names of a number of semi-divine personalities who have consecrated the holy hills by living there.

Common earth becomes immortalised by the virtues and sacrifices of great souls. In Varanasi, Agastya, Kardama, Markandeya, Hariscandra, Kapila, Dattatreya, Gautama, Durvasa and many others have left their mark.

Contrary to popular belief such pilgrimages, and beatified holy sites of Varanasi have not been associated with any fantastic reports of 'appearances' of this or that deity. The Purana legends are leg- ends, and must be left to the technique of interpreting any symbolic or metaphoric language. Most of the holy places are associated with human penances and sacrifices. There have been scores of such sanctified sites in Varanasi.

Today only the names remain to remind us. The hermitages dedicated to sage Agastya, or to the saintly and only Dhruva, or to Bhairva Dattatreya, or to the great Vyasa, still ring true as we stand on the consecrated dusts.

Raising monuments to great pious names until today has been a healthy tradition in Varanasi. The latest in the tradition are Tulsidasa, Aghori Kenarama, Tailanga Svami, Svami Bhaskaranda, Sant Ramakrishna Paramahamsa, aye, even the

saint of our own times, the Divine Mother, Mã Anandamayi, and the mystic Avadhuta Thakura Sitarama Omkaranatha.

Pilgrimages in Varanasi act like a directory of the culture and heritage of Hindu India.

We are aware of the divisions of Varanasi in zones (khandas), Omkara, Visvanatha and Kedara Khaṇḍams.

Another way of dividing the zones, also prescribed by the scriptures, has been arranged for those devotees who desire to circumambulate the most holy spots,-daily, occasionally, or annually. These three sections are known as (1) Varanasi, (2) Avimukta, and (3) Antargṛha, or Visvanatha. These are used for parikrama-s (circumam- bulation around a sacred place).

Pancakrosi is a parikrama thrown around the ancient limits of Anandakananam. It is designed to be circumambulated in five days. It goes round the hills, with Ganga as the eastern boundary. But the Pancakrosi pilgrimage goes around Varanasi, with Ganga, Asi and Varana making its limits.

This shows that Varanasi was a compact city, but the wooded area was extended far to the west and the south.

Only once a year, at a given period between the winter and on-coming spring this parikrama is undertaken by devouts to be finished in five days of walks, failing, by carriages, litters or on animals.

The Avimukta or Madhyamesvara-parikrama is done in a day.

Though rare these days, there still are devotees who undergo the penance daily.

The Antargṛha-parikrama, however, involves the most glorified shrines of Varanasi, and is largely frequented by

thousands of devo- tees. Madhyamesvara includes some celebrated shrines of great im- portance.

The area of Antargṛha, which we shall have to probe deeply in order to conduct our investigations regarding the lost Varanasi, is a compact one, and still vibrant. Evidence strewn over this area, though rendered unrecognisable through periodical destruction, pilferage and administrative vandalism, still considerable. This area holds a mine of information, and would prove most rewarding for our in- vestigations.

It is this area (Antargṛha-Madhyamesvara) which holds the heart of the lost Varanasi. This discovered, Varanasi is discovered, and grasped.

A probe through this area based on a map would unfailingly illustrate our contention that the Rudravasa for extended, and over- flowed the 'heart', the Antargṛha, which had been, originally, the base of the Rudras, and from which they had been displaced and squeezed out to hang around the perimeter of the flat and marshy land of the west and south.

It is said to have to state that no area of Varanasi has undergone a more vandalised change. Old Varanasi has suffered a metamorphosis due to the unthinking minds of those who ruled the events of the time. Yet this is an area which is still focused by the priests and guides, as well as touts who hang around the commercial houses and eating establishments, making it the hub of a so-called Varanasi tour.

III

No innocent traveller, devotee or sight-seer would ever suspect that in 'doing' Varanasi, thanks to the professional guides, chaff would be served as grain, base metal exposed as gold, cultured

paste imitations traded for the genuine gems and jewels. The popular guides, who care very little for either history or accuracy, generally misguide the real enquirer. Yet the most dependable custodians of a Varanasi- tour are the selected Pandit-guides, or Priest-guides. One has to select with extreme care.

A good look at a map would illustrate that the Rudravasa far extends the core i.e., the Antargṛha, and overflows it. Originally the Rudras inhabited this area. But they were displaced and squeezed out to hang later on to the marshes and the flat lands.

Not a speck of the ancient habitation in this area is in place. The worst damages, contrary to common belief, were not caused by the destruction of the temples, which in any case, were constructed past the Gupta era. But the most telling damages have been caused by a complete removal from the map of Varanasi the historic landmarks, like her rivers, ponds, lakes, and above all the famous valleys. These anyway predated the temples, which had been raised not before the first century AD in any case.

Who did that kind of damage to Varanasi? Who were responsible for that vandalism? The answer is vital to our story.

Varanasi has yet to be discovered.

Most tanks and reservoirs, most rivers have been suppressed un- der tons of debris left by centuries of destruction and neglect. Ponds and lakes, deprived of the natural and seasonal feedings by the rains, and the great-rivers got dried up, for lack of seasonal replenishment.

In spite of the total destruction, various tell-tale indications guide the scrutiniser to locate the classical spots described and glorified by the chronicles.

The monuments of the highest importance are still traceable. But few keep their tracks. Those lost monuments, or temples and lakes, which have been very severely interfered with, do not fall within the 'bounds' of the intinerant sight-seers. These, if they are there, fall within the complex of the notoriously narrow overcrowded lanes. The ancient Varanasi gasps and abides time within these lanes, away from the motorable roads.

The time is not far when even these faint evidences would be gone under dusts; when other structures would bury the past. Varanasi is dead. Even its ashes are being wiped away by indiscriminate city-fathers. (The decay of localities like Gaḍuresvara, Manasarovara, Isargangi are cases in point.)

IV

Tourists in Varanasi are taken around the 'city' for paying homage to the popular, known and 'reputed' temples alone. Temples after temples, deities after deities, tucked away in furrows of possible and impossible hideouts, never come to light unless insistent customers made a stern demand. The religious residents, however, know the hideouts, and pay their visits without a scholarly zeal. It is impossible to get around Varanasi and make a full discovery.

Going around numberless temples could be extremely boring. Making the stereotyped rounds of beggars, mendicants, bulls, squalid impersonal crowds, holy touts, unholy pimps, sly guides, hungry expectants, ready to make a dash for a quick copper is not every- body's music. All of them go on their

rounds making a living on the innocent credulity of a pious devotee.

The insistent enquirers, who may be few, painfully find out that the guide himself does not know. Ultimately such jigs tire out both the curious and the scholarly with an equal degree of disappointment, and possibly of disgust.

In fact it need not have been so. Varanasi has always been a very interesting and rewarding place to visit. Varanasi's inner soul has always been at peace with itself. Moreover, in those times, centuries back, not the saint-encrusted uninteresting temples alone, but the quiet woods, the cool ponds, the idyllic surroundings, and above all the peaceful company of sages made men eagerly seek the green resort of an arborial Varanasi.

Whether has fled that Varanasi? Whether is it gone?

V

Let us never forget that the famed places now known as 'temples' are but the extensions of personal, or communal ego and glamour, power and pomp of the human weakness for perpetuity of names. By constructing walls around the holy of holies, and by depriving some of the right to enter the sanctuaries, the powers that be do not help maintaining the frank open society of the original Rudravasa.

Ancient Varanasi was a free place, free for any and everybody, without any restriction, bar, or authority.

Temples which we see now, have been built up by later hands, by kings, emperors, priests, law-givers and wealthy merchants, for their vested interests. And all this in the name of piety.

The temple-culture, we have noted, has never been the native culture of Varanasi, as it had been in Babylon, Ur, Persepolis, Amarna, Luxor, Athens, Knossos, and Nineveh.

The Vedas did not know of temples; temples were unknown to the Ramayana, and the Mahabharata. We hear of no temple-talk be- fore the Greeks, the Scythians, the Gandharas, and specially before Emperor Kanişka who, in any case had been a foreigner.

No temples, and of course no carved or sculptured deities had adorned peninsular India prior to the Christian era. Students of the Jatakas, and of the great Epics often meet with chaitya-s, stupa-s, vihara-s, and vapis (ponds), tirtha-s, kundas (tanks), and kupa-s (wells); but they do not hear either of carved images, or of masonic temples until spoke Fa-hien and Hiüen Tsang. Temples were un- known to the adorers of the Mother, or of the Sivalingam.

This prompts us to step out on a new track, and undertake a new journey.

Our aim is a discovery of ancient Varanasi. To achieve that purpose we propose to attempt a possible reconstruction and rehabilitation of the Varanasi that had been the pride of Bharata. That Varanasi was the sinecure of the cultured East. It drew to its famed tapovanas, temples and markets, princes, priests, paupers, and penancers as also scholars, poets, philosophers and music-makers.

What magic in Varanasi had attracted saints and savants: person- alities like Vardhamana MahavIra, Gautama Buddha, Sankaracharya and Vallabhacharya, KabIra, Ramananda, Gorakhanatha, Ramakrishna, Dayananda, and even our own

Mã Anandamayi? The best and the greatest of the land always sought to be in Varanasi. This pilgrimage of eternal call for the cosmic could yet reveal many secrets that could surprise us all.

There had been the Varanasi and the Ganga; there still is the Varanasi and the Ganga. The temples and the embellishments came later, much later. We are eager to get across the temple-times, and rediscover that lost Varanasi with lingams, woodlands, ponds, lakes, rivers and wells.

In this context we shall keep ourselves studiously away from any discussions on the spiritual substance of Hinduism, or on the sacredness of visits to temples and priests.

11

A Shifting City

I

It has been mentioned that Varanasi had been marked out into three sections: Visvesvarakhanḍa, Omkarakhanda and Kedara-khanda. We have a fairly good idea of this layout of the entire holy city, which emphasises the Omkarakhanda as the most important area of the three. Around this area the most remarkable sacred shrines, and the holiest of the 'ghat-s' were situated.

The rest of Varanasi, beyond the hills, (that is, to the West beyond the present BengalItola lane, beyond Chetgunj and Jagatgunj Roads, along the South from the Kedara and Hariscandra points upto Khojwa and the G.T. Road) actually all around the PancakrosI Road, was covered with vast forest lands. Here and there the area was dotted with welcome minor water reservoirs, variously known as kunda, talão, pokhara or puskarini, e.g., Revatikunda, Venikunda, or Beniatalão, Lahariatalão, IsvarIgangItalão, Pisacamocanatãlão, Misir-pokhara, LakSmikunḍa, etc. Some of them were as large as to cover 3 to 4 hundred acres. Mandakini covered more than a square mile, and together with Matsyodari substantially much more. Smaller reservoirs were too many.

Unfortunately most of these reservoirs are now dying or dead, like Misirpokhara. Expansion of urbanisation is a monster that swal- lows all, and leaves no trace behind. There is no trace of Revati- puşkariṇi (ReorItalão), Misirpokhara or the Great MandakinItalão.

The presence of so many water reserves point out two major charac- teristics of the lay out. One, the gradient of the land sloped from the East to the West; and two, the real forested area

was comparatively unpopulated, or populated by the people of the land, who studiously kept themselves out of the Aryan reach. Besides these, a major characteristic of this area was its apparently endless luscious greenery. The major section of modern Varanasi had been canopied with forests.

Even in the twenties and thirties of this century Sankatmocana or Bhaironatha, or Sankaramatha had been forested areas, dotted with hermit cottages. The area has now been 'developed'.

This was not the case with the Omkarakhaṇḍa, that is, the slip of land hugging both the sides of the Varana, particularly its southern bank, reaching upto the MandakinItalao and Macchodari.

Varanavati, Varanasya or Varanasi was situated hereabout. In a later day Puraṇa (Linga), Siva is heard informing Parvati that Vara- nasi is situated between Asi and Varana. There is a point in Siva's (or Linga Purana's) contention. Between Asi and Varana was Anandakananam, the favoured haunt of the Sivas, Bhairavas and Pasupatas. So it was indeed Siva's favoured haunt, not the Varana- facing township.

Skanda Purana, and specially Linga Purana says something else, and attaches a special significance to the name 'Madhyamesvara', madhyama meaning 'the middle'. The deity must have been acting as the 'central' protective Lord of the city.

So, Varanasya was the 'city' part; Anandakananam between Asi and the Varana was Siva's own favoured haunt; and there was Madhyamesvara dividing the two. (Macchodari, we might recall also meant the 'middle' of a fish-formation).

According to this authority Krttivasa is the principal deity, and starting from Kṛttivasesvara (modern Alamgiri Mosque near Ausan- ganj) the actual Varanavati or the Varanasi KSetra extended a cou- ple of miles all around, with Madhyamesvara making its centre.

But with all this 'the hill' and the forests beyond extending to the south was Siva's favoured haunt (Linga Purana).

Motichandra in his book* says that it would be wise to keep in mind that the city extension on the northern bank of the Varana spreads well over several miles; ... and if this is accepted, then the description given in the Puranas about the ultimate limits of the city looks quite acceptable.

The existence of the city on the northern bank of the Varana may be deduced from the presence of Sarnath, from where the Bud- dha often came across to speak to the populace of the 'city'.

Even now all along the route between Varanasi and Gazipur one finds several scattered smaller townships and villages which remind us about the flourishing trades, that gave Varanasi the name 'Jitvari' i.e., 'the city where a trademan always makes a profit' (Cf. 4.3.72 of ASṭadhyayi).

The Jataka also indicates the extension of the city along both the banks of Varana. The presence of several localities such as Saidpur, Kaithi, Potli and Vainrat still reminds us of the well populated areas that existed between Mṛgadava, Kapiladhara, Markandeya and the Varana. Of these Vainrat is of great importance to the antiquities of Varanasi, because the archaeological evidence unearthed near Vainrat throws much

light on the extension of Varanasi beyond the northern banks of the Varana.

We shall now try to reconstruct the lay out of the holy town as described in the Puraṇas.

In doing this we shall be called upon to exert some amount of self-control, and drastically erase from our mind the picture of the present layout of the city.

We shall attempt this with the existing landmarks.

The most ancient records available describe Varanasi as a city built around three major hills (Trident of Siva). Because of the thor- ough devastations caused by the modern city builders, these land- marks may not be distinguishable now. But the fact stands that the ancient Varanasi did stand, as we have already noted, on and around the three hills.

And these hills, despite the devastations, are still left with tell-tale traces of their hill-like identity, the river to the east, and the slopes and valleys to the west, ultimately.meeting into marshes and wild tracts.

These traces studied with scrutiny, reveal another very interest-ing feature. tawy "lood aid ni borboM The lost rivers and lakes (talaos) of Varanasi could also be trace- able with the help of these rocky features. Thus the non-existent could be established, as it were, with the help of the existent.

In this way in our venture of rediscovering Varanasi, the traces of the 'lost hills' would prove to be of immense value to us, and pro- vide us with significant guidelines.

Generally speaking the ancient three divisions referred to already, distinguish the three hills and their projectories.

Of these the most important one is the central hill, now covering more or less the area from Trilocana to Dasasvamedha in the east, and Kabiracaura to Godhowlia (inclusive of Rajadarwaza, Chetgunj, and Benia) in the west. This area comprehensively locates the highest attitude of Varanasi, and includes the Chowk.

The contribution of this hill to Varanasi is a pair of streams.

One of these ran down south, and met a stream flowing down the marshy lands of what was Misirpokhara. Then it turned east, and fed the Godavari channel, which met the Ganga at Prayag ghat.

The other flowed down what is now still known as Bulanala (nala- channel). This stream emptied itself in Mandakini Sarovara. Both the streams flowed through wooded valleys inhabited at places by ashramites. The busy shopping lines bordering the busiest road of modern Varanasi in no way reminds the hill, the water-channels, or the shrines and ashramas in a wood.

As the meek witness of the grand lake and surrounding temples there still breathes a choked tank of moderate size with a Devi tem- ple and a Rama temple nearby.

The area in its modern outfit presents us with a bewildering and confusing mass of traffic. This is so because this important area formed the peak of the Anandakananam, and as such was the most coveted haunt for the sages and seers of those ancient times when no breath of commerce passed through the shaded

reserves. No enemy thought of attacking, or occupying it, until on its peak was built a temple.

Naturally it formed in course of years, a formidable cluster of subsidiary temples, shrines, chapels and monasteries. There lived sages, scholars, saints along with temple attendants and priests.

Trade is where pilgrims are; and crowd is where trade is. In spite of ages of devastations, and the resultant changes, the popularity of this area did not decrease. As the centripetal force of a mighty eddy draws to its centre all the floating debris, so in spite of devastation after devastation public attention and business persistently assem- bled around the centre.

In and around this area, from age to age thrived temples after temples, shrines after shrines, hostels, caravansarais, even schools for Vedic and secular studies.

The famed musicians, singers, dancers and entertainers of Varanasi had their quarters built around the temple market square.

Age after age, as and when the shrine of Visvanatha was flattened to the ground, reconstruction persisted. Whenever the ruling authority relaxed, or showed signs of loss of power, enthusiasts reapplied their zeal to build up the area. There has always been money here. There was no end to destruction, and there was no end to reconstruction. Dedicated religious zeal often could match fire with sword, agony with enthusiasm, memory with expectations.

On this issue a significant observation may be pointed out.

Varanasi, as no other city in India (except Somanath in SauraSṭra) has been victimised again and again by fanatics.

After destructions the Visvanatha temple had been raised again and again. Why the more celebrated temples, such as Krttivasa, Avimukta, Omkara, Kale- svara, Madhyamesvara, so much hailed in the Puraṇas in supercession of Visvanatha, had never been 'reconstructed', and how this one gained the lime-light, poses a significant point of enquiry.

We know that the hills, as distinct from the city-temples along the Varana and the Mandakini-Macchodari area, had been (1) re- sorts of sages, (2) peopled with the Ganas and Rudras, (3) covered with arboral vegetations and woods. The Sivalingam on the top of the hill was a Svayambhu lingam (Pre-Aryan iconic shrine, not re- ally-'consecrated' according to the Sastras) adored by the aboriginal autochthons. In fact the 'true' Brahmins hesitated to partake of the prasadam of this 'Bhairava' deity. [The devotees were regarded 'caste-less', and deprived of maintaining the 'sacred fire'. (Satapatha Br.)]

Thus the temples, or the shrines on the 'Hill' when broken, the poor Gaṇas, Rudras, Bhairavas lost little breath in re-assembling again in quick time, and started afresh assembling and continuing their prayers. Being poor, and being free of scriptural handicaps, the Bhairava-Visvanatha in spirit could not be, and was never broken. When the richer urban temples went into disuse, when the urban wealthy failed, the wood-dwellers survived even by changing the site, even foregoing the interest in a new temple!

Today, when other celebrated deities have receded due to disre-pair, the autochthons of the woods have seen their 'original' Svayambhu-deity to maintain his glory.

We have to come back to this point.

The fond memories of devotees, like memories of old pets, even after catastrophic changes, found relief and confidence just by cling- ing on to the familiar area. This is not surprising. The shipwrecked mariner finds a great relief by clinging to floating wrecks. Those unfortunates who had been forced to accept conversion, even after the catastrophe, stuck to this area, which they never changed. This explains a thick assembly of these converts in and around Chowk, DalmanḍI, Benia, Jaitpura, Alaipura and Madanpura. The last one finds mention in Vividha Tirthakalpa (VTK) by Jinaprabha Suri1 (c. 1350) as being inhabited by Muslims.

Madanpura was filled with the convert-Hindu population since 1340, when Mohammad Tughlaq was on the throne of Delhi. Though converted, they hugged to their old habitations.bbi ad

Forces of memory activate atavism and instinct; and external pres- sures are hard put to extinguish such visionary ideograms altogether. The drama of total devastation and demoralisation succeeding by reconstruction, and reunion continued for more than seven hun- dred years, dismal sordid years of degeneration, disintegration and confusion. Which rocked Kasi-Varanasi to its tottering bones.

As the only sentinel of that disintegration, there persists yet an- other settlement of tragic humans, a society of the camp-followers of those horrid times. That settlement reminds us of the glories that was Varanasi and the Visvanatha Temple.

It also reminds us of our critical approach to the dignity of our own womenfolk. This stern reminder is provided by the only Red- Light area of the town, still clinging on to the skirts of the temple grounds, and reminding us of a human tragedy worthy

of the sym- pathetic pen of a Steinbeck, a Hemingway, a Pushkin, a Camus, or perhaps, a Sarat Chandra Chatterji, or a Premchand.

Of that on and on.

III

Let us not get restive, and attempt to move faster.

The change from the Rudravasa and Tapovana stages to that of Anandakananam-Gauripitham and Avimuktam must have taken some considerable number of centuries. And then again from that stage to arrive at the stage of Varanasi proper must have taken quite another few centuries. From there to come to the era of the Islamic invasions (1194) is equivalent to navigating through the entire period of Illiad, the Hittites, the Sassanians, and Alexandar. Buddha was not born, nor neither Jesus, the Christ. Varanasi is indeed ancient without senility, and antique without archaism.

The history of Varanasi which we are out to discover starts even prior to the so-called Vedic times, for the Vedics had come into clash with another culture well established on the hill tops.

The earlier clashes between the Aryan immigrants and the Yaksas and Nagas of the hills, the clashes between the earlier Jainas and the Buddhists, and those between the Buddhist and the Brahmanics had brought about wide changes in what had been Mahasmasana Rudravasa. The compulsions of the ferocity of the feuds established Siva-Pasupati as a Brahmanic god, Sakti as His alter ego, Ganapati as their guard, Bhairava as their commander, Surya and Narayana as the compromise witnesses for the establishment of peace.

The Hindu citadel of Anandakananam had always been a reputable centre for Vedic studies. We are aware of the existence of a Brahmavasa, and a Brahma Sarovara at the Dasasvamedha. We also hear Hiüen Tsang speak of schools and colleges in Varanasi maintained by schools of both Brahmanism and Buddhism.

Buddha had naturally been attracted to this spiritual centre like iron to a magnet. He realised that if he had to change the Vedic social form, and supersede its magnificent interpretation of Nature, Life and Beyond, he would be obliged to convince the Varanasi scholars. Varanasi is a prelude to the spiritual conquest of the Hindu heart. The Aryan model could get a foothold only when the Dravido- proletariats allowed them easy quarters.

But Buddha, according to the Jatakas had come to the crowded commercial Varanasi, and not to the learned or to the elite. He did not look for debates, like Adi Sankara. He wanted to win the heart of the mass.

The balmy character of that arboreal resort had in the meanwhile undergone great changes. The repeated feuds of the Haihaya, and the Pratardana clans, (supposedly descending from the line of the Yayatis) had brought about a change in the Varanasi ethos. Ech- oes of those feuds and the new changes fill the pages of the Vedas, as well as those of the Puranas and the Epics. So for the Buddha, not the Brahmanas of the hermitages, but the Ksatriyas, Vaisyas and the neglected class mattered. He spoke to them in cities and city- parks.

These feuds, referred to as 'disturbances', were related to the Yaksas, Gandharvas, or simply to the Ganas, which appears to

be an euphemism for pre-Aryan proletariat risings against the militant usurping Aryans. In other words it was a showdown between pri- mordial Tantra and Vedic Brahmanism.

We have already noted the encirclement of Varanasi by these Gana-shrines, and by the much more ancient shrines of the Bir-s, Bhairon-s, and Deo-s.

Although accepted by the Brahmanics, Ganesa still maintains his real role, as he is honoured as the 'Gana-nayaka, the Leader of the Hosts. Legends were written to have Ganesa accepted, along with Siva and Sakti, as equals if not superior to the Devas of the Vedic order.

This is indeed a theory, but like all theories is based on certain characteristic facts. There are still existing a number of monuments all around the city of Varanasi reminding us of the Ganas, and their habitats.

The shrines of Bir-s, Bhairon-s, Surya and Ganadevas

(Ganapati, Gananayaka), are still popular amongst the mass, who are still con- sidered to be 'outside' the folds of the "upper strata" in Aryanised classifications. These shrines stand in commemoration of the fights of the Siva people against the attacking Aryans.

It could, therefore, be safely concluded that the Vedic conquer-

ors, before establishing themselves in the Avimuktaksetra (the val- ley from where Siva or His Gana followers could not be expelled) were well advised to accept the indigenous deities.

The cooperation of these rowdies become essential for the new-

comers to stay in peace. They had to accept and entertain the deity, Tantra-Siva, along with His cohorts. Visvanatha continued to remain the Bhairava of Varanasi, with Visala, or

Visalaksi as His alter ego, Bhairavi. This accepted, the new-comers found peaceful accommo- dation in Anandakananam's pleasant environment.

IV

The pair of Bhairava and Bhairavi suggests another message. Let us concentrate on that message.

In the Puranas Visvanatha had not been offered the most important place in Varanasi. That honour belonged to five other lingams. Omkaresvara, Avimuktesvara, Krttivasesvara, Mahakale- svara and Madhyamesvara (The Great Five).

All these were situated, as we know, around the Varana valley, and the Macchodari-Mandakini complex, that is, away from the main peak where the Adi-Visvanatha Hill stood on the heights of the Jnanavapi gradient.

These five had been the principal lingams. K.Kh. does not award Visvanatha an equal gradation. Both Visvanatha and Annapūrna have been recorded as minor deities. (Yet another sign of Aryan, or Vedist neglect of Tantra-importance.)

Why?

For the answer we have to probe into the reigning philosophy that guided the contemporary devotees of Varanasi. Since the Great Five today are remembered only in name, since their great temples have been turned to dust, Visvanatha's role in Varanasi has come out in full glory. It was not so before.

But actually the role of Visvanatha had been quite different from the function that the great Five served. K.Kh. as well K. Mhtm. ex- plain how the Great Five temples had been inspired

by that or the other sage. There is always a legend attached to the establishment and consecration of these lingams. But the story of Visvanatha had been unique. None established or consecrated it. It is claimed to be Svayambhu. (Modern Viswanatha is not Svayambhu.)

Visvanatha is a 'Natha', and indicates the deity's importance to the Aghori Tantra-sivas. As such it moved on a track absolutely different from the Vedic sages.

Visvanatha and Visalaksi (or Visala) together form a highly Tantric couple adorned from times immemorial. Such lingams have been classified as Anadi or Svayambhu (pre-Aryan?) (without a beginning, or Self-revealed) lingams. In almost all cases these indicate a Tantric group, as different from those lingams which have been later conse- crated by sages of the Vedic school of thinking. The Svayambhu calls for no consecration.

This also explains the material prosperity of the Great Five lingams, and the amassed wealth in the temples which had attracted the raid- ing looters. In contrast the Tantric Visvanatha shrine a Bhairava- shrine, atop the solitary hill, and avoided by touchy Aryan sages maintained a lower key of adoration, and the first onslaughts. This has already been referred to.

Correct to traditions even today the strictest Vedic Brahmins hesitate to partake of the cooked prasadam from the Visvanatha tem- ple during Annakuta, when the prasadam from Annapurna is gladly accepted. Further, when Annapurṇa enjoys an annual Annakūta during the Divali celebrations, Visalaksi remains almost unrecog- nised.

The Tantra current in Varanasi has been effectively suppressed by the Puranic current. Books like K. Kh., K. Mhtm., Agni Purana, Tirtha Kalpataru, Vividha Tirthakalpa affected the local minds.

It was only after the series of demolitions the Great Five temples suffered that the entire area went into obscurity, and time came for the people of Varanasi to raise with a fanfare the temple of Visvanatha. Eventually that too had became a target. But then the people concentrated their attention to rebuild this structure, the other temples having been not only ruined, but also built over by Islamic structures. Reconstructions were not even dreamt of.

Historians read a message from this topsy-turvy position of the Varanasi temples. They recognise the dominance of the Tantric stream in Varanasi, and the attempts of the Vedic stream to look forward to impose its dominance on later structures. But once there structures came to grief, they found no other escape but to fall back upon the pristine Tantra stream, which to them had played a sec- ondary role.

One might not agree totally with this view, but it is an inescap- able fact that the demolished Puranic temples never got up again. The Great Bhairava temple of Visvanatha was again and again raised with a feverish gusto. This was so because of the surging devotion of the mass of the people whose combined pressure could not have been suppressed. The reconstruction and rehabilitation programme of the pristine Varana-area and of the contiguous five temples meant also a huge unmanageable stake of fortune which could not be collected with a threat hanging that it could be destroyed again by future fanatics. History showed that the precaution was realistically based.

Actually the balance of the city life had tilted after the demolition of the Varana front, and its temple complex along the Mandakini lake. The people eager to hold on to something, naturally sought the shelter of the wooded south and west; and from this historical accident an emphasis on the temple on the hilltop on the extreme side of the Mandakini-slope attracted their attention. This was the first temple after climbing the Chowk hill, and it was away from the Mandakinitalão.

V

In this context it would be helpful to recall the tradition of the Jaina and Buddha Sarnath, and the cultivation of the Tantric creeds in those sacred precincts. After the advent of Atisa SrIjnana, Padma- sambhava and later of Nagarjuna, Buddhistic practices had under- gone a sea-change. Particularly the Mahayana system had influenced the common people. The writings of Asvaghosa, Vasumitra and Abhinavagupta had overwhelmed the people. Sarnath had become a hot bed of Tantric practice. The Gahadavala Queen Kumaradevi's role in this practice was extremely important.

Under the impact of these popular practices Visvanatha and the Bhairava temples along with the temples of Ganapati stole a march on the demolished temples of the main town of Varanasi, or Varanavati.

Before we close, we want to probe two frequently used words in this connection. One of them is the variously used word 'Pitha', and the other is 'Ksetra'. Varanasi is a Ksetra; and it is also called Gauripiṭha. Once we understand the implication of these words, and enquire why Varanasi is called a Ksetra as well as a Pitha we could appreciate why throughout the ages

Varanasi has been honoured as a Rudra-centre, a Tantra-centre, a centre for the cultivation of the Vama method of Tantric sadhana,

Once this is appreciated, we would find no difficulty about understanding why of all the cities Varanasi is called a 'Ksetra' of Kasi Visvanatha.

Both Ksetra and Pitha have Tantric nuances. This, however, is not the case with 'Dhama', another suffix added to pilgrim centres. Since Ksetra and Pitha have a Tantric import, Dhama has a Vaisnava one. Thus the Dhamas are predominately Vaisnava in tone; but the Pithas, and Ksetras are generally Tantric seats.

Kşetra always enjoyed a special importance in Tantra. The word kşetra in Sanskrit indicates the entire body, or the sexual part of the female from where creation springs. Dictionaries recognise this meaning, and also emphasise that a triangle form also could be known as Ksetra.' The symbolic import of both ksetra and langala (plough) in Tantra has remained obvious with the Tantra adepts.

Hence amongst pilgrim centres those which are predominantly Tantric are known, generally, as Ksetras.

Of course the use of Pitha in Tantra has been associated with the legend of Siva and Sati, when Viṣṇu had to dismember the body of Sati carried by the woebegone Siva, and get the great Lord free from a load of bereavement. The parts of the Devi's dismembered body fell all over the land; and each place, where the pieces fell, was sanctified as a Pitha.

Pithas in general, thus, are non-Vedic in character. It is very rare for Pithas to have great temples built over them. 'Pitha'

means a 'seat', not a temple. Generally these are shrines without much flour- ish around them.

This is so because of the primordial origin of Tantra shrines. One is not surprised to discover one such shrine all on a sudden in a remote place quite unfrequented by men, but claiming a lonely devotee attending to its requirements. (E.g., Taradevi shrine near Shimla; the Kali shrine in the village of Tirole in Arambagh, near Burdwan, West Bengal; Astabhuja in Vindhyachal; Yogini in Bankura; Tara in Kasi; Garsnesá in Ellora; Chinnamasta Rajarappa in Ranchi.)

Even the Varanasipiṭha of Visalaksi having been preserved with- out much fanfare had escaped demolition from the raiders; so is the case with the very little known shrine of Varahi in Mir ghat, Varanasi.

The cases of temples are quite different. The temple culture has never been the native culture of the subcontinent. It had a historical beginning with the advent of foreign cultures introduced into the land by traders, travellers, and particularly the Greeks and Scythians. We must remember that the entire Western Asia (Iran and Arabia, inclusive of the Gulf) was predominantly conducted by an elaborate and powerful 'temple-culture', Egypt, Syria, Iraq, Greece, Cyprus and Persia had been under the subjugation of a priest community. India was very close to these countries through trade and commerce. Hence the introduction of this culture into India became a matter of course.

This view explains why in our Puranas Varanasi has been specially known for four principal holy of holies. These are the Manikarnika Hrada (lake), Cakratirtha, Jnanavapi and

Pancaganga. Remarkably all of them are unadorned bathing places had no temples, not even any human habitations about. These tirthas, as old bathing places were called, had been surrounded with only trees and gardens, shrines and hermitages.

Of course the mighty and benign Ganga has been there, flowing serenely eversince.

The area around Manikarnika enjoyed other factors of great importance.

VI

We have noted that the main city of Varanavati was sitting pretty astride the Varana river, with its galaxy of temples on both the banks. But when a human colony finally settles around a place, like other amenities, it has to arrange for the disposal of the dead.

Where was the dead disposed? We have seen that the use of Manikarnika-Brahmanal itself as a cremation ground had been started as a feature of the eighteenth century. So there must have been other arrangements in the past. This could not have been the far away Hariscandra ghat near the Chet Singh Fort, or the Khirki ghat. Which 'ghats', then, were used for the disposal of the dead?

We of course know of the cremation grounds situated at the con- fluence of the rivers Varaṇa and Ganga. Some people still continue to use the same place as a crematory ground. Close to this is the humble shrine of Dattatreya.

It is natural for cremation grounds not to be too near the living places, yet not inconveniently too far. If the main township

devel- oped around the Macchodari-Mandakini complex, and along the banks of the Varana, and ran up the hills to Trilocana and Pancaganga, then the crematory grounds could not be far away.

They were not far away.

When the city became congested due to the construction of the Gahadavala fort, the Smasana near the confluence was shifted to the rather lonely south. There is a Yama ghat near what is known as Sankaṭa ghat today. The name Yama signifies the presence of a Smasana there, or thereabout. The presence of the shrine of Yama-dharmesvara confirms this supposition.

Sometimes later the city extended further south, and with that the Smasana was also shifted.

We find today a shrine of Hariscandresvara closeby, and could safely infer that the tragedy of the King Hariscandra had brought him at this place (and not near Kedara ghat) to serve time with his undertaker-master. The modern Hariscandra ghat is just a replace- ment after the northern cremation ground was closed. If further confirmation is necessary, one may state that at this place even to- day is celebrated the Yama-dvitiya, or Bhaidvitiya ritual and ablu- tion. Yama is the Lord of the dead.

Since the original Dattatreya shrine near the Varana confluence had been closed, the new Dattatreya temple has been raised near to this new spot, where there still exists a Smasana-Vinayaka temple.

The banks of Varanasi-Ganga have always been the playground of the Tantra adepts, and the name Mahasmasana, by which Vara- nasya was known before, describes fully its ancient character.

Further more, what is known now as the Mir ghat and the Manmandir ghat, according to traditions, had been used as a Smasana, which was close to Prayaga ghat and Dasasvamedha ghat.

The study of the shifting of the crematory ground along the Ganga from the extreme Varaṇa point to the present Manikarnika site in- forms us, one, that under the pre-Vedic culture the banks were used indiscriminately for crematory purposes, which justified the name of Varanasi as Mahasmasana; two, that the hill range of Varanasi was predominantly Tantric, and the name Gauripiṭha for the settlement was found very appropriate; three, that the progress of the city, when the city had overwhelmed the Anandakananam, proceeded from the Varana banks and advanced towards the Asi point gradually.

Because of Tantric predominance, and because the presiding Bhairava of Varanavati was Siva Visvesvara Himself with His alter ego Visala, and because the guardians of this sacred spot were the circles of Bhairavas and Ganadevas settled all around the city, with Kala Bhairava as the Chief, the pride of the place was given to the Visvesvara lingam. The group of the five greats, Krttivasa, Omkara, Mahakala, Avimukta and Madhyamesvara, as later Vedic additions, never enjoyed the public veneration showed to the Tantra-lord Visvesvara.

The great five temples, and that of Bindumadhava, after their demolition, were never reconstructed. In fact most of them have been relegated to oblivion. In contrast, the Visvesvara temple was again and again constructed; and in spite of bloody opposition of 'the faithfuls' Visvanatha continues to remain the

focal point of Hindu attention. Today Kasi is Visvanatha, and Visvanatha is Kasi.

Tirtha Vivecana Kaṇḍa (Laksmidhara) admits Saiva-Tantra to be a popular religion of Varanasi. Tantra's popularity was unchallenged. Motichandra' quotes the Matsya P. to indicate that in the Brah- manical era Avimuktesvara, and not Visvanatha commanded the supreme position in Varanasi. Linga P. precedes the Gahadavala- age by a century and a half. Laksmidhara's Krtya Kalpataru quotes Linga P. to show that the site of Visvanatha had always been 'by' the Jnanavapi tank, and although for a while Avimukta became the chief temple of Varanasi, Visvanatha remained the centre of Saiva Tantra, which had fascinated Kumaradevi, wife of King Govindacandra.

This would show that due to some influence (probably royal, or Brahmanical or both) the temples built by the Varana had gained more influence for a while.

What account for this partiality, and neglect of the traditional important deities?

Since Hiüen Tsang had first seen the array of temples on the Varana bank, each one of them had suffered thorough demolition. Even Macchodari was suffocated. The great Barkarikunda with its colony of temples was devastated. No reconstruction was attempted, except for meek substitutes tucked here and there. Avimuktesvara, the lingam considered by the Brahmanical literature as the chief deity of Varanasi, finds a corner place within the present Visvanatha temple itself, as a subsidiary. It appears to be most surprising that when Akbar and Jahandar Shah, the two Mughals, had allowed re-

construction, even then no attempt was made to lift the five fallen gods from the obscurity they suffered.

And eventually when the Visvanatha temple was constructed by the Marathas, and the Jnanavapi was cleared, no one even thought of attending to the Great Five, and resurrecting the glorious past. But none could neglect or forget Visvanatha, the Ksetra-deity of Varanasi. The Tantra tradition proved to be much more strong than any other fanciful elaboration of subsequent deities.

Eversince, through the liberal munificence of wealthy merchants and of the princely houses of old, Visvanatha (principally a Natha deity worshipped by the Nagas and Ganas) acquired that supremacy over Varanasi which indeed belonged to it originally. The latest tem- ple understandably passed from the hold of the Tantrics to the Tripathis of Varanasi, who still control the temple's central affairs. That is to say, that the Brahmanical way finally succeeded in gain- ing supremacy over Tantra-ascendancy.

The Tantra school of Varanasi maintains that these later growth of Brahmanical Siva-Centre kept the original Visvanatha-Bhairavacentre under a shade. Visvanatha's modern role as the Supreme of Varanasi lingams (there are not many existing anyway) is the result of the demise of the Puranic lingams, no longer remembered, except by diehard scholars and devotees.

The crux of the matter is that in spite of the feuds, and the re-

sultant devastations that followed, the pre-Vedic character of the Anandakananam remained unchanged for those who study the social habits of Varanasi. Tantra prevailed over Yajna, Siva over Viṣṇu, and Sakti over Laksmi.

The ancient 'crescent' township remains to this day a meeting ground for all shades of religious opinions, Vedic and not-so-Vedic. Adikesava, Pancaganga and Cakratirtha attempt to balance the Tantra tilt.

VII

Change from the Ganga-period to the Deva-period must have taken altogether a good few centuries, until the times when history began to talk of the battles of the Ten-Kings, Sura-Asura, Kuruksetra, Jarasandha, unto the day of the Kalacuris, Sakas, Pulindas and lastly of Pratardana, Divodasa, the Haihayas, and the Gahadavala.

Thus, we presume, the Anandakananam of the Gana-Sivas and Rudra-Sivas got its name changed into Varanasi, when the Varana became important, due to Royal occupation, and Asi was fixed as a limit of their occupying zeal. It was an omnibus name assumed by the oppressed, but original people who were the residents of Maha- smasana, Gauripitha and Rudravasa.

Time did not permit the city to enjoy the name undisturbed. It had again undergone changes during the times of the sweeping devastations caused by the interreligious feuds between the Jainas, Buddhists and the rest-(Ajatasatru, fourth century BC).

The adoption by Varanasi of the state-name of 'Kasi' must have taken place about this time, and the indiscriminate mentionings in the Puranas and in the Epics actually had this confusion established. (Cf. Vrijji records.) That this proved concluding to the occupying ancients too is proved by the question put by Saint Agastya in K. Kh.'

The series of attacks by the Haihayas and Kalacuris forced the Gahadavala Kings of Kasi (tenth century AD) to shift the

capital to the southern hills. This made Anandakananam surrender its identity to the name of Varanasi, as the Asi-channel was involved at this stage. The arboreal abode assumed and urbanised name. The sharp jaws of a city gradually devoured a tapovana culture.

After all these devastations, Deva, Gana, Jaina, Buddha, came the most telling devastations of all, the Afghan and Mughal attacks. Inspired by a newly found emancipating militant unitary faith 'the believers' from the West came in hordes with the seeming purpose of spreading 'the Message' to the idolatrous Kafirs.

The ancient bones of religious Varanasi crumbled under that brute pressure.

VIII

Let us now try to visualise these devastating changes in terms of actual tonnage of ruins and debris left over the centuries. After the deluge, not a soul dared stir to remove a single piece of brick or stone as long as the least chance of the menace threatened. Recon- struction was out of question.

The heaps went on accumulating, and the filth defiled the surroundings. Holy ponds got gradually choked; wolves, wild hogs, and jackals paraded where dancing girls used to entertain their gods. Brambles, hyacinths together with bamboo groves and acacias made fowl of what used to be the most adorable meeting places of the devotees. Gardens turned to wilderness; fountains were silenced, and squares, where music and dramas were staged, became the hide- outs of snakes, pigs, jackals, dogs and vultures.

For the redemption of the lost temple-sites heaps of ruins claimed attention. Without clearing them, no new start could ever begin.

The clearing exercise assumed colossal proportions. The enormity of the undertaking made the stoutest hearts abandon the project altogether. Yet attempts continued to be made. The poor and the deprived laboured hard to rehabilitate their gods who failed. They kept their backs bent, and helped raise new temples. Again and again the devout persisted, and again and again new and ever new attacks came, dashing all earlier attempts for recovery to dusts.

Remarkably though, no one ever touched the humbler wayside shrines, and the poorer deities. The ancient Deo-s and Bir-s continued their modest existence almost unmolested. The wealthy temples alone, understandably, attracted the zeal of 'the believers'. Those who tried to remove external idolatry could not demolish their internal greed, avarice and rapacity. These were demons for gods.

Our task, therefore, appears to be a formidable one. We have to reconstruct the lost Anandakananam-Varanasi as described in the Puraṇas (Vayū, Agni, K. Kh.), or as reported by travellers such as Fa- hien, Hiüen Tsang, Al-Beruni, Ibn Battuta, Tavernier and others.

The many rivers, lakes and ponds, all held in holy regard, had been molested beyond recognition. The vandalising forces from age to age must have found it easier to dump the hills of debris and the rubbish heaps into the lakes and ponds around. Without levelling the dumps and the rubbish heaps, reclamation of space became impossible. The stench from the

rotting lakes poisoned the air. For keeping out pestilence levelling the water holes became imperative.

Varanasi was subject to chronic plague, cholera, pox and malaria.

The newly found commendable frenzy for redeeming Varanasi never paused to consider if their enthusiasm would cut off man's life from a vital requirement like water, or if by their unthinking act they would permanently remove natural evidences of a great cultural history.

We of the oriental dispensation of attitudes have very little regard for preserving antiquities. We attach scant respect to the cultural responsibility of preservation of antiquities. Nursed under a philosophy of evanescent transience and mutability of life we care but little for permanence and continuity. We neglect. We are still at it. We still permit vandalisation of antiquities. All around Varanasi (as elsewhere), which is still dying of aggressive land grabs inch by inch, scores of tanks are dying of suffocating filth and indiscrimi- nate dumping. A feverish enthusiasm for urban land for building is symptomatic of another type of greed. This new-time devastation cannot be alleged against any anti-religionist enterprise. Greed builds its own anti-social brotherhood.

In destroying their own lakes, forests, ponds and rivers the people of Varanasi have totally neglected the innate beauty of the lay- out of the lost Varanasi. Today they do not even visualise the great and noble heritage lost to them.

By such unthinking acts the residents and city fathers of Varanasi permanently removed natural evidences of a cultural past, the glo- ries of which no architect could enhance by

adding urbanised abominations fostered under the banner of town architecture! The mod- ern Varanasi-man wastes no breath to think of the poise and the beauty of the ancient three hills. In fact they would frown if at all they are reminded of the fact that such hills, lakes and streams ever embellished the town.

Today people would not even know where the hills had been, or what this author has been talking about. Life for them reserves much more relevant demands. Once nations forfeit their national pride, bartering a mother's heart, a wife's honour appears to be a broker's deal. Assassination of cultural environment then becomes a cold calculating commercial proposition.

At the moment it appears to be a tragedy of great emotional impact that in time such blatant disregard would remove important historical evidences, if the land-grabbing urge is not yet checked.

In 1915 Varanasi prided over more than 50 great tanks. In 1997 not one of these remains. Such noble tanks as Lachmikunda, Bakariakunda, Suraj- kunda, Pisacamocana, Isargangi, Kuruksetra, Khoj- wahtalão, Revatikuṇḍa or, Reoritãlão are dead or dying thanks to a neglect for which we cannot blame any foreign hand. Our attitudes to life and living have undergone a suicidal change.

By such mad pursuit after blind urbanisation the beautiful tapovana named Anandakananam was for ever destroyed. Its natural tranquillity had been permanently evaporated through political folly and rapacious lust for wealth.

And today, when the killing process continues, whom should we blame but ourselves? Reconstructing the panorama of a lost city, reclaiming the beauty of a natural window is much more important and spiritual undertaking than reconstructing a temple. Reclamation of the Kurukşetra lake offers a laudable example of such planned effort towards recapturing history. Pisacamocana, Isargangi, Laharia-talão, Kapalamocana are dying, and the city fathers are fast asleep.

Disturbances descended on Varanasi as if in a series. The rulers of both Kasi and Magadha (184-148 BC) continually fought for the prize of Kasi. Then it came to fights between Kasi and Kosala (644- 1194) which forced the kings of Kasi to think of a change of the capital (1094).

The city then extended most probably from the Varana confluence to what is now known as Pancaganga hills, in the east, and to the Mandakinitalão and the Godavari channel in the west. This formed the main classical 'City of Varanasi', still creeping through the ancient wooded hills; yes, the woods had still been there, when the Gahadavala were fighting the Kalacuris. (1114-18)

Even at that, the real damage was still not much; or, if at all, only marginal. The throb of the past Anandakananam still could be felt far deep into the south of the city, which maintained its character and spiritual forces, tucked away into the heavily wooded area where the lost Anandakananam still breathed, although faintly.

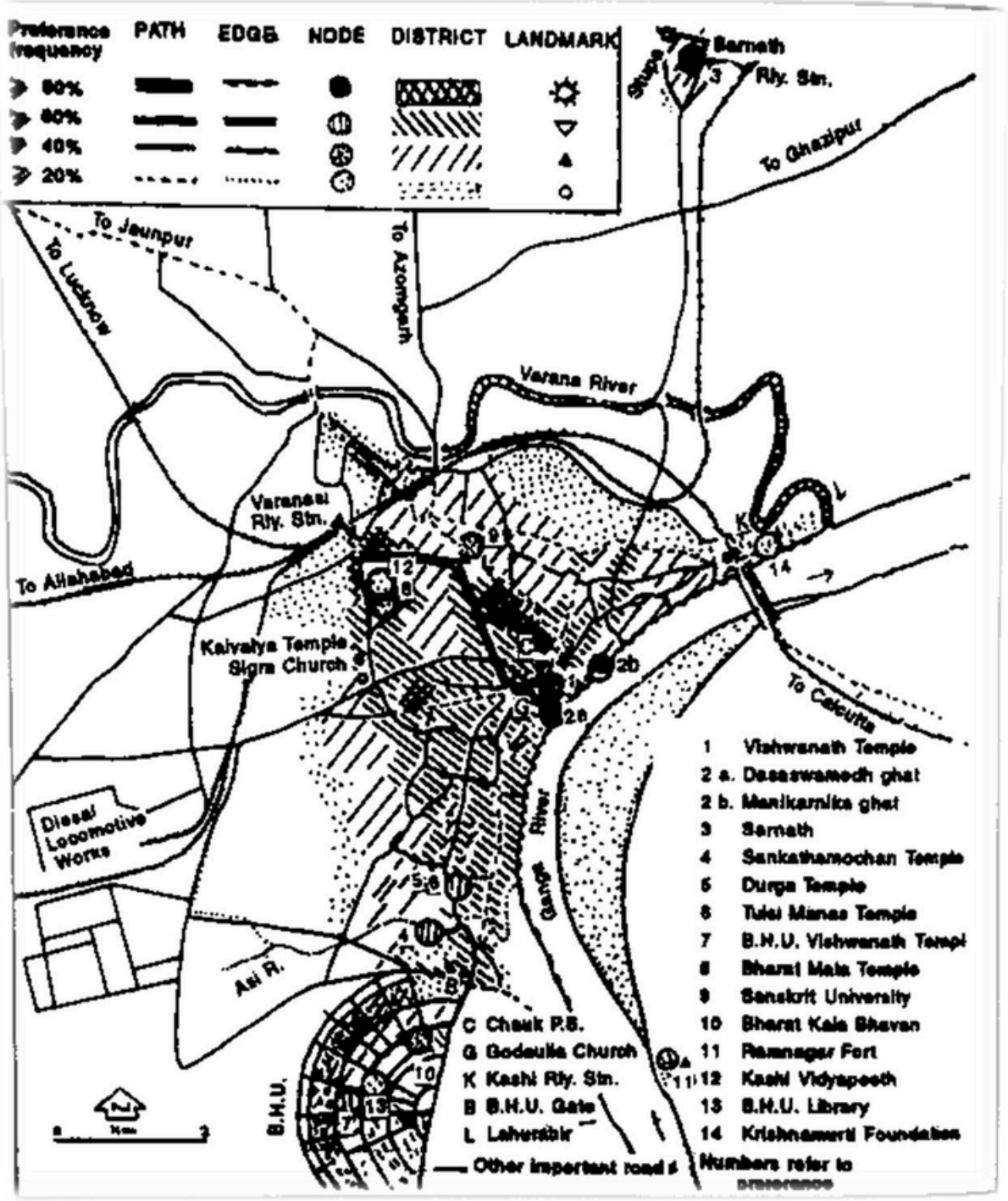
IX

From topographical and archaeological evidences it has been established that the old city of Varanasi occupied the heights of

modern Rajghat area, and extended along the now forgotten, but then well known Macchodari and Mandakini lakes.

Inscriptions declare that the Gahadavala kings who ruled Varanasi with their queens used "to bathe in the Varana confluence, and offer homage to Adi-Kesava".!

The adjacent area, a large extension of land along the lakeshores, was famous as a trade centre. The fame of this centre has been mentioned even by Patanjali (second century BC). We have noted that because of the existence of flourishing market Varanasi was called Jitvari, the 'city of profits'. Even in the days of the East India Company, and those of Warren Hastings, the market carried on good business, as it continues to do so even today. Both Fa-hien and Hiüen Tsang and later Turko-Arab travellers revel on describing the crowds, and the products of these markets. A catholic connois-seur of commercial enterprise would not hesitate doing it even now.



Map 11. Varanasi: a composite cognitive map-sketch

To this day Varanasi transacts all business here. The markets are still known as Bisessargunj (market of Visvesvara), Lachmicabūtara, Kunjitola, Thatheribazar. A very important section of this busy locality is even now referred to as Pakkimohalla (in conservative quarters), or Uncimohalla (the

neighbourhood on the heights). This in a nutshell contained the city of Varanasi. Hastings was right in deciding to hit Chet Singh in his belly by choosing this centre to bear his attack.

Despite the continued military upheavals the heart of Ananda-kananam stood firm. Kasi the kingdom, with its capital Varanasi, coexisted with the wooded Anandakananam, although the sudden influx of commercial and secular refugees (escaping from constant military attacks in the northwest) had changed sufficiently the norms and mood of the ancient woodland.

First the cupidity of the freebooters, and secondly, the sinister cynicism of a far away insular merchant-group finally managed to erase whatever was left of the ancient peacefulness of Varanasi.

Real Anandakananam was pulverised by human cupidity and re- ligious bigotry, added to a callous disregard for the institutions of an ancient people.

What foreigners left incomplete, the present city fathers are com- pleting with a vengeance.

In this changing event of the drama of Varanasi, Omkarakhaṇḍa and Visvanathakhanda suffered the most. The rivers, the tanks, and ponds of which we read so much in the K. Kh., and which were situated within the area under review, got almost lost. That loss amongst others, removed such remarkable waterfronts as the Goda- vari stream, the Agastyakunda, the Bhutesvara and the renowned Jnanavapi.

Molesting nature's bounty in the name of religion or commerce demonstrates an attitude of cynical indifference to natural

beauty. It amounts to the worst degree of transgressions against any claims to culture.

The Islamic transgressors, keen on loot, always avoided disturb- ing the natural environment. They were particularly careful about water sources and gardens. Whatever they had spared in Varanasi landscape, the practical strait-jacket British administration methodically got straightened out, filled up, and buried under the excuse of town development.

The loss of a hundred or more of these beautifying and life-giv-

ing water sources sapped away the soul and spirit of Varanasi be-yond recapture. Anandakananam has vanished. The hills and woods, the lakes and rivers have been reduced to mere half conceived vague sounds treasured in the museum of fond memory. Who remembers Mandakini Lake today?

Yes, the large scale destructions that have been taking place

eversince the twelfth century, may, (even from before, when the Jaina-Buddha challenge threatened the Brahmanic order) severely damaged the charming panorama of ancient Varanasi.

Today Varanasi does not seem to offer a clue to the alluring

topography described in the K. Kh., or reported by the Chinese trav- ellers.

All these records refer to a series of impressive temples, bordered by crowded bazars. These were stocked with rare expensive com- modities brought from different parts of the land.

Holiday makers were entertained by well trained dancing girls,

choicest musical soirées, display of puppet shows, bouts of wrestling and boat matches.

Whither have gone these? Whither has gone the much vaunted temple-on-the-hill named the Moksa Laksmi-vilasa? The present Visvanatha temple or Jnanavapi complex looks like a parody of a great-epic.

Since Hiüen Tsang himself had seen this temple-complex, it must have been much more ancient than the early fifth century, even earlier than the seventh cent. BC when the Buddha had finished his preachings.

12

She refusesto Die

I

Varanasi bore its first shock by the end of the eleventh century when Mahmud Ghazni pounced upon it.

This could be a good break for describing that horrendous event. One could be fairly sure that between seventeenth cent. BC and twelfth century AD for about 2000 years Anandakananam had en- joyed uninterrupted its peaceful glory of an Elysian bliss. Since Varanasi had a reputed antiquity even predating the Aryan immi- gration, it is safe to imagine that the proverbial kananam i.e., the Elysian Fields, had established a tradition of peace in and about the hills and the Varana front, not yet fully urbanised.

The dusts of Varanasi appear to contain some mysterious supply of perennial élan, or life-force. When great cities like Puruşapura, Varahamula, Taksasila, Dharavati, Avanti, Sravasti, Kanyakubja, Vaisali, Nalanda, Kausambi,

Ahicchatra, even Mṛgadava had melted away, Varanasi persists.

Varanasi falls, rises out of the dusts, falls again to rise again. It appears to contain some mysterious and perennial supply of élan, or life-force. Varanasi refuses to die. She raises her battered head through heaps of ashes and brimstone, which her enemies pour on her age-gray head time and again.

The unexpected tragedy fell in the year 1194. But the elastic vigour of Varanasi defied the periodical deluge, and rose again in the spirit of the 'never-die-Pyramids' of Egypt.

II

We step back a little earlier, and start with Aila-Pururavas whose capital was situated at Pratisthan (near Jhunsi in modern Allahabad or Prayag). The rulers of the 'Lunar race' ruled Kasi upto the times of Jaichand of the Ghori-Pṛthviraja notoriety (1194).

Starting from Pururavas let us do some reading of fast-history and set the frame right, so that our conception of the immortal Varanasi, the chapters of her glories and humiliations, could be set like a picture for future continuity of the story.

Between Pururavas and the Magadhan empire 28 generations of the Lunar Kings were supposed to have ruled over Kasi, after which the Kosalas took over. Then came the Mauryas. the Sungas, the Kanvas and the Kusaṇas under Kaniṣka, who, though a foreigner, was enamoured of the teachings of Buddhism and was immediately captivated by its simple solution of life's riddle. He identified him- self with the Indian stream of life, and lived and ruled as an Indian Emperor.

After the Kusanas came to a miserable halt. The local community of Bhara-Sivas took over the charges of Anandakananam Varanasi, and a formal worship of the lingam, as of the Bhairavas, dominated the hills of Varanasi as usual. Siva in the form of lingam and Sakti in the form of yoni, or Gauripitha were adored together as the cosmic symbol of a Life-Spring. The two-in-one appeared to them as the beginning of all beginnings.

Then came the Guptas, followed by the rulers of Thanesvara, and Harsa. Politically Varanasi came under the protection of the Imperial Guptas, who were Brahmanical in their religious beliefs. The protection which they had extended to the traditional institutions of Varanasi effected a welcome revival of Saivism, but which covered Buddhism also.

Then in the eighth century came the Palas of Bengal. Varanasi again received Saivic support from a line of rulers who were not only Brahmanical, but also enthusiastic patrons of the Tantric cult of Sakti. In the Palas merged the traditional Varanasi Bhairava-Gana adoration with the Brahmanical mutation of form and spirit.

The Rasṭrakūta king Indrayudha occupied Kasi in AD 916.

These Rasṭrakūtas, an indeterminable factor of Indian history, were patrons of Saivic adoration, or Sakti.

The Gahadavalas of Varanasi, some say, are clan-descendants of the Rasṭrakūtas.

In 1041 came the Gahadavalas, and they ruled Kasi for a period of 153 years (1015-1194). The period is a short one, but Varanasi, the city, marked historic progress in every respect from these Gahada- vala kings. Eighty per cent of modern

Varanasi is that the Gahadavala had planned it to be. Out of that eighty per cent, fifty percent have outlived ravages of time, and are remembered by the people as legends and lores are remembered with love and admiration.

III

Then came the catastrophic raids on Kasi by hoards from the north- west, who used a completely different technique of military skill with a different kind of motivation.

Mahmud Ghazni and his followers had loot and plunder as a motive, and the obvious excuse was conversion to a faith which was supposed to be the only true faith of the world. Devastation and ruin, pillage and plunder, fire and rape instigated the lusty ranks to fall on the innocents, like locusts on standing crops. India stood aghast. A colossal metamorphosis gripped the culture of the sub- continent.

Recovery was made difficult by the moribund attitude of the society of the times. It was dominated by Brahmanical codes of honour, rigid castes and narrow acceptance. Once 'contaminated or defiled' by the touches of the cow-eaters, no Hindu could come back to its former society. The 'defiled' Hindu was not only alienated, but suffered something more.

The firm basis of the society built up by the Great Asoka permanently split in two. Kiths and kins were relinquished to the wolves, only because the 'wolves' had touched them. Instead of praising the 'braves', and welcoming them back, the unfortunates, male and female, were relegated to permanent rejection.

The great mass of the affected was obliged to join the camps of the enemies, where they found not only safety, but honour and justice as well.

The breach created then between the Hindus and the converts has not been sealed since.

But religious strifes between the Buddha, Jainas and the

Brahma- nics caused not a little damage to the temples, chaityas and monasteries. The great art piece of the three dimensional anthropomorphic copper statue of Siva, complete with locks, serpents, and with the stately visage of a yogi, as described by the Chinese savant, was of copper found too tempting to be left alone because of the mass and the jewels stuck on it.

The very mention of an anthropomorphic (human shaped) three dimensional Siva statue suggests several points at the same time.

1. The deity that the Rudra-Sivas, or the Bhara-Sivas worshipped was a symbolic iconic stone (slab, or boulder, or a smooth rounded pebble) a crystal, or, a meteoric form of undefined shape.

Because similar shapes have been found in the Harappan exca-

vations, and because these had been substantiated by the discovery of a seated form of yogi-like human, surrounded with animals and serpents, and crowned with some kind a gear, historians and archae- ologists interpreted it as a Siva Pasupati deity. This would be so; but there is a hitch.

If this were to be a Siva-image, it is a Siva-image of its own

kind, without the symbolic embellishment, of the 'Third Eye', and with- out the trident, or the skin (tiger or elephant) garment.

But the Bhara-Sivas of Varanasi stuck to the iconic form, which still predominates the Varanasi shrines of Siva, and Saivic establishments.

2. The progress from iconic forms of deities to a three dimensional anthropomorphic statue-form was introduced 'after' the Gandhara-Kusana era (200 BC-AD 320). So the copper statue of Varanasi described by Hiüen Tsang, could not have had any earlier date of birth.

3. No doubt the copper-deity was tempting and expensive. It was quite worth taking some risk by those who sought through their attacks nothing more than loot. Copper was to them a very rare, expensive and important material.

When we know that Mahmud Ghazni's sole aim was plunder, and not the establishment of any lasting empire, it is not difficult to assume that the copper statue was looted by him, or by his agent Nialtgin. It is possible that this statue became Nialtgin's trophy (C. AD 1033.)

After Mahmud's defeat of Jaipala at Puruşapura (1001), and still after the complete defeat of this son Anangapala, who was assassinated (1021-22) the legendary Hindu Shahi family came to an end.

Once Mahmud had tasted the wealth of Hindustan, he continued with his raids until he died in 1030 with no interest in ruling the land, a typical symptom of hard-core plunderers.

In his greed to collect more and still more loot he at last invaded the fabulous Varanasi, and demolished all its temples. At this time he heard of his brother's death in Ghazni, and rushed back. His deputy Nialtgin continued the job. In 1034 the temples of Varanasi were razed to the ground, inclusive of Avimuktesvara,

the most im- portant temple of Brahmanical Varanasi, situated on the northern borders of the Jnanavapi (1033).'

We shall hear of this lingam later.

Varanasi was dead.

IV

From 1034 to 1192 Varanasi breathed some relief. During this period a powerful dynasty ruled over Varanasi. When in 1018 the Gurjara Pratiharas of Kanauj were defeated by Ghazni, the Pratiharas shifted to the north and the east, and continued to impose some kind of formal rule on the beleaguered township.

Vidyadhar Chandel began to rule Kanauj, and Varanasi with Prayag was ruled by Gangeyadeva of the Kalacuris (1039). His son Karna died in 1070.

By 1090 a new strong and imaginative set of rulers came to rule Varanasi. These were the Gahadavalas, a very powerful dynasty, which ruled over the best part of Uttar Pradesh of the times. Between 1030 and 1090 Varanasi had to do without Avimuktesvara, also known as Visvesvara.3

Under the Gahadavalas Varanasi flourished after more than half a century of slumber. The shops and markets around the Varana had all been molested by Mahmud and Nialtgin. The great temples of Omkara, Krttivasa, Adikesava, Mahakala, Madhyamesvara indeed the entire locality had been brought down to dust. The grandiose loot was thorough and complete. Even the principal shrines, such as Avimukta, also known as Visvesvara, Bhavani and Jnanavapi were not spared. The destruction of the Svayambhu linga on the Jnanavapi- hill hurt the people the most Some sticklers however had objected that

a Svayambhu once broken cannot be replaced. This was ignored, and a lingam was reinstated.

Under the Gahadavalas all these temples were restored, and the glories of the great city once again began to attract traders and trav- ellers. Varanasi flourished under the very effective administration of the Gahadavalas.

Visvanatha (also known as Visvesvara/alias Avimuktesvara) and some other temples came alive again.

In course of time this second temple with the lingam was destroyed in further raids. To raid temples was to amass wealth.

V

In 1192 at the second battle of Terrain, Mohammad Ghori of Afghanistan defeated and killed Pṛthviraja Cauhan. He secured his entry into India. His aim was different from that of the avaricious Mahmud. Unlike Mahmud Ghazni he had come with an aim to spread the new found religion of Islam, and then acquire the land of Hindustan in the name of Allah. His was not entirely a looter's aim. He was inspired by the idea of building an Islamic empire over a land of 'milk and honey'.

At his hands, in the year 1194 at the battle of Chandrawar, the last of the Gahadavalas fell, and Varanasi was totally sacked over again. This was Varanasi's second full-scale sack. The lingam of Visvanatha, rebuilt on a particularly eminent height, drew a special wrath from the furious iconoclast.

But there was one lacuna. Though he succeeded in molesting the Jnanavapi, along with the Ganapati temples around the Man- dakini, the Varana temples of Omkara, Mahakala, Kalabhairava, Madhyamesvara, and acquired in the process

much wealth, he thought mistakenly that he had destroyed the lingam of Visvanatha. He did not. He could not. It had been replaced by a devout Brah- min who had managed to hide it in the waters of the Jnanavapi.

The second sack of Varanasi was complete. The temple on the central hill was again demolished.

Qutbuddin, Ghori's viceroy in Delhi, died in 1192-93. Varanasi was then being governed by an agent, Jamaluddin. His name still sticks to Varanasi in the locality known as Jamalpura or Jamaluddin- pura.

This attack left a considerable number of converts in Varanasi.

Jamalpura today is filled with the descendants of the converts. Yet, convert or no converts, they were true Varanasians, and they still behave as such. Their love for Varanasi keeps them closely attached to Varanasi handicrafts.

VI

As if to rub salt on open wounds, Qutbuddin and his governors further humiliated the Hindu community by a new process.

The temples had contained many objects of art. The refined eyes of the conquerors could not have failed to absorb the utilitarian values of those embellishments. Qutb and his agents issued orders to save and utilise those ruins and stone pieces, brackets, pillars, arches or gates, to be used in building new mosques. All over Varanasi mosques were being built with the materials collected from the ruined temples. Of these the mosque of Adhai Kangure still retains some of the Hindu art pieces. (Cf. Aḍhai-din-ka-Jhopara in Ajmer.)

This resourceful technique had been well tried in building structural monuments around the Qutb Minar of Delhi, which is deco- rated with the ruins rifled from the nearly Sun-temple of Anangapala. We could name several other mosques built around this time using the same expedient.

Near Chaukhamba of Varanasi, there stands one such mosque to this day. The other is a Qabargah built in the name of one Maqdūn Shah. It is decorated with excellently carved Hindu pillars. In Gulzar- mohalla of Varanasi this Qabargah still stands for art-lovers to watch Hindu masons and admire. (Let us not forget those art-loving poor who, under the benign rule of the Gahadavalas, had produced such art forms.)

But a unique mosque built in this period is the one situated near Rajghat. In size, splendour and architectural excellence this last mosque is remarkable, specially for its inner decorations and structural eminence, all of which comes from this or the other Hindu temples.

VII

Of the Khiljis, Alauddin and his general Malik Kafur have been as- siduous destroyers of the wealthy Hindu temples. Their combined exploits were conducted with naked pride and calculated ferocity added with a bigoted sneer.

This attitude of the conquerors had permanently damaged the Hindu ethos. The bigoted acts so much alienated the people that even generations after, the old scars remain unhealed. Cherished religious forms and sentiments had been thwarted with impunity.

No attempt was made by the conquerors to plant any confidence in the minds of the people, so that they always felt

exposed and threatened by the violent attitudes of these new men of god. Steamrollers build firm roads; but they are poor instruments for nursing an infant, making a rose bloom, or forcing a cuckoo sing. An ad- ministrative machinery to be efficient must be benevolent; and to be benevolent, a ruler must 'feel' with the people, and respect them.

The Hindus were made to have their own kith and kin permanently alienated from the main stream of life due to forced conver- sions, and rapes of their womenfolk. This did not help much in ameliorating their grievance, urging them to make new moves for adjustments with the newcomers.

The so-called Aryans, i.e., the Hindus (tribals and aborigines included) had accepted in the past many such new forms of religion coming from many new cultures; and having accepted, they still lived in perfect harmony with the many communities living in the subcontinent.

Reorganising the society, and reinterpreting the Sastras was tech- nically an old devise for accommodating conflicting ideologies and interests. The Hindu always did it because of their inner philosophic compulsions.

They were taught to flourish through accommodation of inter- ests, and mutual understanding for a peaceful coexistence.

The Hindu always conceived of the Supreme as 'One in All, and All in One'. But the dire spite of the new conquerors, and their violent ways with women and children permanently alienated the Hindu-ethos any fraternising considerations. The accommodating meek Hindu automatically reacted to atrocities, and gradually developed a complex about these

foreign infiltrations. Unlike the Greeks, the Satraps, the Kusaṇas they could not be absorbed into the Hindu family.

Because of the continued palace-intrigues of the Slave monarchs (1210-90), and because of the rising wave of a popular philosophy of the Sufi-s, the pressure of Muslim fundamentalists appeared to show signs of some liberalisation. The diehard was softened down by the tender touch of metaphysical understanding. Of the great names amongst the new Sufis we can never forget poet Amir Khusrau, Hazrat Nizamuddin Auliya and the Emperor Kaikobad himself.

Along with this tide of liberalism new ideas began to influence both the Muslims and Hindus of Varanasi. Varanasi particularly welcomed this change. A change of inter community understand- ing was for the first time noticed amongst the people who realised that constant violations do not please God. But this faint chance of a universal brotherliness, that for a while came by, was soon dashed to the grounds because of the deeds of the imperial tyrants.

With the mild and brave Iltutmish ascending the throne of Delhi, Varanasi made its last attempt to get freed from the oppressive situation. A rebellion was soon quelled. Sultana Raziya ascended the throne to assert herself. She had all the Varanasi temples, built during the quieter days of Iltutmish and Kaikobad (between 1266-96) demolished. Varanasi appears to have kept quiet during the crisis.

This was done more to please a court clique than to justify Raziya's own convictions. But that could not save Raziya. The court, smarting within to have to function under a female-domination (in contravention of the shariat), murdered her.

In the meanwhile, i.e., during the times of Iltutmish and Kaikobad the Visvanatha temple on the hill, which had been repaired, was destroyed for the third time.

We learn of the reconstructions of the time of Iltutmish from a contemporary work Prabandhakosa where the author expresses his thanks to a Gujarat merchant Vastupala who had offered a dona- tion of Rs. 10,000 for the service of Lord Visvanatha.

Between 1296 and 1316, Alauddin Khilji too became aware of the profits of temple loots. Since the north of India had nothing more to offer in this direction, his attention turned to the south. He destroyed the Hindu temples of Gujarat and the Deccan, with the chief objective of extending his territories.

The northern temples having been already denuded by his predecessors, Ghazni and Ghori, he decided to turn his face southwards. The southern temples were fabulously rich.

In this pursuit his greatest assistance came from his crafty and able general Malik Kafur, who looted, and devastated the temples, as well as the temple-cities,-Kumbhakonam, Trichur, Kanci, Madu- rai, Mysore, Dvarasamudram, etc. The ancient Hindu houses of the Yadavas, Hoysalas, and Pandyas were whiffed out. The mighty Vijayanagara Empire became a thing of the past.

The Visvanatha temple was destroyed for the fourth time, and this time almost permanently. After this demolition the ancient hill, was abandoned.

Nonetheless it is a very surprising fact that during this very time on the Jnanavapi a certain Padma Sadhu built a very ostentatious temple, and called it the Padmesvara temple. How and when this came to be is one of the surprises of history.

From an inscription panelled against a wall of the Lal Darwaza mosque of Jaunpur we discover that "... In Varanasi, near the shrine of Visvesvara, Padma Sadhu built a temple, the towers of which were as tall as the peaks of the Himalayas...." (Sadhu in Sanskrit means a merchant, like a São.)

Thus we infer that (i) the temple site on the hill was abandoned for more than one reason; (ii) despite all threats, the indefatigable Varanasi builders persisted in constructing temples; (iii) the Padme- svara temple was erected on the elevation in front of the hill, where (probably) the present Adi Visvesvara temple is situated. The ancient elevation could not have been utilised (though it was utilised later when opportunity came) because of the reasons: one, if at all, the place was sanctified by Visvesvara alone, and to have occupied it in the name of other deities would be a sacrilege: two, from that height to the banks of the Jnanavapi the entire slope was choke- filled with the abandoned debris collected over repeated demolitions. The final abandonment of this area left the accumulated de- bris collected over centuries in a formidable heap. The citizens actually began to use the heap as a dumping ground for urban refuse. The stinking place began to be called 'Katwarkhana', a 'dump for refuse', and to this day, as has been noted before, the name sticks to a narrow lane opposite the present Satyanarayana temple as a reminder of those humiliating times.

There could be no doubt whatsoever about the lay out of the temple grounds from the hill to the tank during this period. The entire slope was made up from a heap of mess and garbage, a monu- ment of muted emotions of millions of the oppressed Hindus. Such utter disregard to the cherished sentiments of a

great people did not help the aliens to merge into the mainstream of the Indian life, although such mergers used to be a liberal practice adopted so far.

The Padmesvara temple was not the only one of its kind to have been erected at this time. From a Varanasi inscription we come to learn that yet another temple, one of Manikarnikesvara was erected about this time (1359).

But because the attention was diverted from the ruined north,

i.e., from the banks of the Varana to the extensions in the south, Varanasi got a welcome respite: and Varanasi again rebuilt itself, reorganised its market, and the new temples began to operate smoothly without any fear of interference.

This break might have in all probability granted an opportunity for the Chowkbazar to grow in replacement of the extensive market bordering the Macchodari and the Varana.

Varanasi had a will to live. Varanasi would not agree to die. After the Khiljis, came the times of the Tughlaqs of Delhi. Prince Juna, the son of the first Tughlaq Ghyasuddin, came to the throne, under the name of Mohammad Tughlaq. It is a relieving fact that this mon- arch, very educated, and intellectually a person far ahead of his time, knew to respect learning.

He was much attracted by metaphysical speculations. He was positively influenced by a great Jaina savant Jinaprabha Sūri. His book Vividha Tirthakalpa (already quoted) is a treasured treatise, written in a very realistic style.

Rarely in this period we come across a work of this kind where the author has been more interested in the facts of life and society than in mere polemics, or straight superstition.

We could gather several interesting and engaging facts about Varanasi of the time of this maligned and misunderstood monarch of history. Monarchs generally are not supposed to evince much abstract thinking. If they do the contemporaries and the Court condemn and reject him. (Cf. Kaikobad, Shah Mir Kashmir, Dara Shukoh.)

Even at the time of Jinaprabha Sūri, Varanasi had not yet lost its vernal charm, or its reputation of patronising learning and art.

According to him the learned of Varanasi were experts in logic, metal- lurgy, chemistry, mineralogy, rhetorics, astronomy, histrion- ics and drama, orthography, grammar, literature, etc. Scholars from 'all the countries' assembled here.

He divided Varanasi into four sections for his detailed description. (1) Deva Varanasi was where the temples crowded, that is along the Varana, Macchodari, Mandakini, upto the Visvanatha hill; (2) Rajadhani Varanasi. The area was inhabited by the ruling class, or the Islamic people. This must have been connected with the fort, and extended upto the present day Rajghat, Adampura and Jaitpura. (3) The third section was Madan Varanasi, a little away from the present Varanasi city, and is known now as Jamania. Madan Chand was a Prince of the Gahadavalas. Madan must have been an important official to have left his mark on a locality in the heart of the present city. It is named Madanpura, now largely inhabited by Mus lims. But the last, (4) Vijaya Varanasi could be Vijaygarh near Mirzapur.

The Jaina savant tells us that Varanasi was full of woody reserves and resorts. The hilly areas had been dug out for

reservoirs for water. There were many deep baolis where water could be reached by a series of steps (as we still find in the Durga, Kurukşetra and Lolarka Kundas). Besides these there had been a large number of big lake- like ponds also, such as Lat Bhairo, Khojwah, Lahariãtãlão, Isargangi and Kapalamocana.

He mentions that the woods of Varanasi were haunts of various animals: but he specially mentions cows, bulls and monkeys in plenty.

From his description of Sarnath it becomes quite clear that from the Varana to Sarnath the whole area was well populated, and Sarnath had not been totally turned to a barren forgotten wilderness of ruins.

VIII

In spite of his love for learning and agricultural development Firoz Tughlaq (1359-88) did not display his tolerance towards the 'Kafirs' and their religious institutions. It was during his rule that the holy Bakaria (Barkari) Kunda was not only demolished, but, the materials collected from the ruins of the beautiful temples were allowed to be freely used for the construction of mosques. The entire tank, considered holy by the Hindus, became an integral part of the mosque, so that it clearly became an inviolable section of the edifice.

The very many artistically famed temples around the Bakaria-kunda were wiped out, and today the place looks barren, awesome and depressing in the extreme.

The time of the Tughlaqs would appear to have been a period of respite for Varanasi, if we consider what passed over it during 1436- 58. During that period a Jaunpur ruler,

Mohammad Shah Sharqui pounced upon the city. The Sharqui-s, though appointed by the Tughlaq monarchs as their governors, had rebelled and declared independence. Of course they were subsequently subdued and driven to Bengal, where they established an independent kingdom: but in the meanwhile the Jaunpur ruler had indulged in the Islamic pastime of sacking the wealthy city of Varanasi, and plundering the Visvanatha temple. The fifth demolition concerned the temple of Avimuktesvara more than the one of Visvanatha, which had become a minor deity compared to Avimuktesvara situated near Padmesvara in the Jnanavapi.

IX

During the fourteenth century Varanasi's trades flourished again, and a new gold rush gripped the traders. People from all around came for settling in Varanasi, and the wooded valley of hills, rivers, lakes and ashramas gave way to a feverish competition for more and yet more expansion and construction. Needless to say that the expanding hysteria was contained around the Mandakini Bowl reaching north upto the banks of the Varana. Temples by the hundreds cropped up: and books were written in support of many more tirtha-s with many more special purifying properties sung in verses after verses. The cumulative effect of this was overcrowding.

A sudden increase in the population matched with an increase of cheats and churls, trading Brahmanas and deceitful guides known as Paṇḍas or Pandavas. The new Visvanatha temple was standing in its full glory on the slopes of the hill. But the temple on the Jnanavapi, that of Avimuktesvara received lauded recognition as the supreme deity of Varanasi. Visvesvara or Visvanatha took a second rank: so did Visalaksi.

Close to Avimuktesvara stood the much famed Padmesvara of whom we have spoken already. The books sang of that too. Obviously such praises were later additions, since it was an unorthodox edifice personally established by an individual.

But the recorded eulogies contained in so-called treatises point out a serious fact. The 'books' written on the principal deities of Varanasi were often subject to the Brahmana clerics who were only too ready to incorporate, change, or compose a set of new verses on unorthodox constructions, with a hope to put the 'new gods' on the map of holy Varanasi, and incidentally make room for new dividends.

We learn that valuable offerings to Visvanatha and Avimuktesvara began to pour in from all fronts of Hindu India. Rulers and traders from Magadha, Bengal, Gaya, Saurasṭra, Madhya Pradesh and the Deccan kingdoms sent their homage regularly to Varanasi. The con- dition of Varanasi at the beginning of the fourteenth century had improved much with flourishing trades, and increasing population.

Urban expansion is always made at the cost of the natural flora and fauna. This was the time that the present Mahajanṭola, Kunjitola, Pakki Mahal, Mangala Gauri, Jagatgunj, Isargangi, Nate Imli, Bises- sarganj, Jatanbar, Trilocana, Nãrialṭola, Dalmandi, Jaitpura, etc., became crowded with houses and shops. This was the time when the population moved fast towards the southern end of the city, and the western borders became crowded with the population displaced by former Islamic raids.

Like all expanding cities slums began to lift heads around Varanasi too.

But the heart of Varanasi, its lakes and water channels, the great lakes of Macchodari and Mandakini, the human habitations on both the banks of the Varana still remained intact. Varanasi was still proud of its greeneries. Varanasi still continued to hug to the Varana and its environs.

Hindu prosperity could not last. Amassed wealth always tempted the rapacious. The poor chaps profited by organised plunder.

Religion was a liberal handmade to provide an idealistic excuse for covering up such inhuman activities.

So came two successive assaults on Varanasi, one of Firuz Shah Tughlaq, and the other of Sikandar Lodi.

The old hill of Visvanatha, as noted, had been occupied by the Mosque of Raziya. This was done to forestall all attempts by the Hindus to rebuild the temple. But all that remains of the famed Padmesvara is but a group of three graves on a platform at the south- ern end of the Jnanavapi mosque. Here, once in a while, some lonely soul sets a lamp burning, or on the Sivaratri night leaves a bouquet unnoticed by fanatic eyes that would take religious offence.

But the hundred years were not indeed dead years. The Hindus realised their fundamental differences from the fundamental ide-alistic Islamic faith, which believed in nothing outside the Qur'an and the shariat.

In contrast the Hindus believed in the principle of a Supreme Conscious power inspiring all lives everywhere irrespective of

their shades of colourful beliefs. This kind of universal concept of God was evolved and cultivated over millennia to contain a galaxy of faiths which had arrived in India to home and strike roots.

This later philosophical content, though laudably liberal and universal, lacked that crystal rock of rigidity and monolithic solidarity which one community needs when fighting another.

The basic idea of Henotheism, Naturalism as different from Poly- theism has been the rock on which the Vedic culture was built. The presence of the Divine spirit in all forms was a part of the traditional Hindu ethos and faith. This attitude was a far cry from Islamic fundamentalism, which refuses to accommodate.

In fact and practice the actual rites and forms of the Hindus in no way projected these philosophic standards. Instead, they projected more and more of the later innovations of Smṛti-s, Sūtras, Purana-s, and of the diehard priestly dominance.

The complexity of the Hindu theological polemics stood in strange contrast with the simple and straight dignity of Islam. If the Hindus suffered from flexibility, Islam suffered from rigidity. Truth, the Buddha says, lies in the Middle Path.

Discriminations and inequalities of various types kept the Hindu society disunited, disabled, and unstable. The Islamic world, in com- parison stood solid like a megalith. This was the result of too much fine-point hair-splitting thinkings on the basis of the Six Systems. Religion and Philosophy do not make good friends.

The Hindus believed in philosophical contentment, and placed the real life as a secondary temporary episode: whereas the

Islamic put ab- Faith, without bothering into many philosophical debates, solute trust in shariat, and in the contents of the Holy Qur'an. The monolithic structure was socially both invulnerable and impenetrable. Whereas the mosques kept doors open for each and every believer, the temples were too vociferous, extremely cantankerous in choosing 'special' types of Hindus from a lesser kind of Hindus: who could not enter the holy doors of their own gods. Caste dis- abilities of a person debarred him from reaching his beloved shrine, for the erection of which he had laboured, and for the protection of which he would lay his life.

The learned Pandits tried to improve matters through forging new laws. As and when it suited them, they minted novel forms of liberalised absorption.

A wave of reformist zeal ran through the society. Godmen rose in protest, and addressed themselves to the outcastes specially. The Ramanandi-s, Sufi-s, Kabira and Nanak-panthis, Vaisnavism of Sri Caitanya and Sant Raidasa brought about waves of a frenzied regen- eration. But the great Hindu amalgam refused to produce a magic- mixture and stood grain by grain separated in smart polemics.

The main body of the Hindus remained adamant, with the result that of the Hindus some came out as more Hindus than the others. Then came the Mughals (1526-1747), and neither Babar nor Humayun thought it fit and opportune to disturb Varanasi in particular. Upto 1559 Varanasi was left alone. Left alone, but there was no Visvanatha or Avimukta temple. No dogs barked the word 'reconstruction'. A whole nation stood aghast and stunned waiting for a deliverer.

But the Great Hindu-Amalgam refused to produce a magic mixture, and unto the last stood grain by grain separated by interference of smart polemics.

13

Dance down the Centuries

I

When the Battle of Panipat was fought between Ibrahim Lodhi and Babar (1526). Hindu India was not so much interested in the en- gagement. It appeared to their jaundiced self-centred-vision as merely an Islamic border feud. Others need not have meddled, they thought Hindu participation in that battle was a mere formality, or a compulsive political obligation. The heart of Hindustan did not make any substantial response in support of a 'Jack'-Khan against a 'Jill'-Khan, for they knew that in the long run no alien occupation would usher goodwill for the Hindu cause. They just 'wished' them away. Perhaps they also felt that the elimination of one usurper by another bonded well for the Hindu cause.

The people of the land cared precious little. They knew that oppression was their lot, whether a Khan ruled, or a Rao, or a Singh. Hunger wears no titles, no creed.

Political consciousness, or national identity, as abstract concepts, did not even remotely stir the soul of India. The mass could not have been less interested in the drama that was being played in and around Delhi or Sirhind. India appeared to

reserve a cultural unity that far outstretched her natural borders; but no idea of a nation- hood had yet emerged in India, or elsewhere in the world. If Hindu- consciousness did react remotely, still the political sense of a Reich- stag a motherland, a common flag did not yet strike.

The larger section of the labouring farmers knew that they inevitably were to be churned and grinded in the long run, irrespective of the side that would emerge the winner. Economic justice, or personal freedom was threatened equally by a victory for Jack', the Khan, or for 'Jill', the Rajput. The common man did not find any 'cause' worthy for making a supreme sacrifice.

He failed to identify himself with the Delhi-drama. If the temple-looters would not molest them, the revenue collectors of the al- mighty Rajasaheb would do so without impunity. Temple or revenue both to them appeared as open-mouthed as hounds bent after their flesh.

In short, the people did not feel to respond to any idea of a national calamity, or even of a personal danger. Danger had been a part of their life.

The only possible binding force could have been a religious sense of community. Religion for the individual was regarded as a personal stake. The only sustenance for the poor and the endangered was an ingrained belief in an Ultimate Power an unseen Divine Jus- tice. The poorer and the more helpless a person, the stronger was his reliance on religion, fate and divine justice. The vague sense for the necessity of a cultural identity appeared to clap on them a kind of unity which ants, bees, cockroaches, crows or monkeys cultivate. God could have been

of possible help, individually; but in the Indian psyche an organised religion, an organised religious stand was unthinkable. This kind of individual appeal to a personal god had been embedded in the very concept of a Hindu's approach to religious identity. If the crisis made the populace respond to the priestly the harassed people also knew that the very Princes and clever priests have been their exploiters, and would exploit them in the future.

The reaction is so personal, so intimate and so reserved that no community response ever affected it. Even if the atavistic past of the Hindu did respond to a sense of community, it lacked the force that could get a desultory mass organised, and stand up against a com- mon danger. They never had an experience of their Princes, or Priests to have stood by them and their wants, once a devastating battle was over. The working mass had to make contributions either for the preparation of the battle, or for its loss of victory in the battle. They found themselves always at the playing end.

Enthusiasm was lacking. Economic reluctance was further diluted by the innate philosophic content of the Hindu polemics, which avoided all types of clear cut articles of faith which could be ob- served by all the numbers of the community. In some of the nega-tive stands perhaps the majority agreed, but in positive articles of faith the community was left to their personal resources.

Naturally, contrary to the claims of the so-called leaders, religion played a feeble part in opposing the political menace. Because of the differing, often contrary, polemics one sect of the Hindus stood as much against another, as one religion against another. If the Hindus could not interdine, or intermarry

with a community of cow- eaters, they could not interdine or intermarry within their own thou- sand communities. The Hindu monolith suffered from a thousand cracks.

A sense of solidarity was completely lacking in Hindu oppositions as against alien attacks. If at all some eminent leaders could at times instil faith into this chequered pattern of a contrasting mosaic, such patches of personalised glorified chapters were exceptions, rather than the rule.

So Panipat First, or Panipat Second battle, Ghazni or Ghori, Babar or Sangã meant nothing to the great Indian subcontinent, or to its inhabitants. There appeared no cause supreme enough to bring together a zealous opposition, or to crystallise a common dedicated front against a foreign menace. Feuds in feudalism are always localised.

II

Bahlol Lodhi was succeeded by Sikandar Lodhi in 1489. The Lodhi zeal for Islam made Sikandar think that Hindustan could be Islamised only through continuing the policy of a bigot, and by de- stroying the centres of Hinduism specially the temples. His attack on the Varanasi temples was thorough. The amount of his loot was considerable.

By the time the Lodhis ascended the throne in Delhi the third temple of Visvanatha had been raised, which Sikandar Lodhi de- stroyed in 1494. And from 1494 to 1594, it appears Varanasi had to do without a Visvanatha shrine.

When Ibrahim Lodhi died in Panipat (1526), and Babar took over in Delhi, the great peninsular India had been merged in its deep sleep of gluttonous plenty. Babar, or Humayun after him, was too busy carving out an empire for themselves. For them a

return to Farghana, which they were forced to leave behind, was a return to continued feuds amongst their ever fighting clans. The wealth and expanse of fabulous India on the contrary was too tempting for them.

Babar, whose keen perception made him aware of the divisiveness of a fragmented society in India, fought to stay back, and strike a firm root to consolidate the gains. In Babar the qualities of general- ship were strengthened by a keen perception of political opportunity and irrepressible ambition.

There is an incident in Babar's life, well described in his famous Memoirs. The chiefs who had followed Babar after a long absence from their country expressed their strong desire to go back to the 'fatherland'. They were too tired of constant battling, that did not appear to end.

A similar mood amongst the soldiery of Alexandar had compelled that world conqueror to retrace his steps. But Babar was made of a different stuff.

Moreover, the might of Babar was equal to his political wisdom. He refused to go back. There, in his Memoir he describes to his reluctant comrades the wealth, the prospects, the opportunities, the dream of overcoming a mighty and luscious land. "What has arid Turkestan to offer you in comparison to this land of milk and honey?", he asked.

From that evidence alone it is clear that Babar, not a mere raider, was determined to establish an empire. Both the father, and the son Humayun after him, kept busy in trying to achieve that goal. They meant to stay and build. Iconoclasm did not enjoy a sacred priority in his scheme of conquests.

They had no interest in squandering an Allah-given chance of building up a dynastic empire in a land of many divisions and no unison, many covenants but no security.

Yet he too found time to try his hand on felling temples. The temple at Ayodhya is a case in point. But Varanasi did not bother him, for Varanasi of his time had no important temples which was worth looting.

His plan of sharing out the fruits of his conquests amongst his sons however, did not pay off. Humayun entrenched by the 'never-say- die' Afghans, with the formidable Sher Shah as a leader, had almost lost his ship, and would have indeed abandoned it, but for an acci- dental end to his redoubtable adversary through a magazine burst.

In 1538 there was a general killing in Varanasi under the order of Sher Shah Suri, but the killings were confined to the Muslim soldiers and people playing loyal to the Mughals. The Hindus were left alone.

Akbar coming into his own, himself took over the government of so important a city as Varanasi. But he too did not show any special initiative for the reconstruction of temples destroyed by his Islamic predecessors, particularly the temples of Varanasi.

The upshot of all this was a respite for the Hindu generally, and for Varanasi in particular. The honours of iconoclastic loot, and periods of terror of rapes and ravages in the name of spreading a religion was for a while altogether stopped. Varanasi tried to breathe natural.

Humayun on his way to conquer the rebel Afghans of Jaunpur had to pass through the wilderness of Sarnath (1530). Because the way to Jaunpur by-passed Varanasi he did not visit the city.

The octagonal red brick structure standing by the modern road to Sarnath still marks his camping ground.

From 1494 to 1580 Varanasi thus enjoyed a respite from Islamic zeal by proxy. No one had time to molest it. Akbar had visited Varanasi in 1556, and put Mirza Razvi and Sher Shah Sakriwal as joint governors of the important commercial town.

But Akbar's training as an Islamic ruler was toned up. He preferred to become an 'Indian' ruler. Guided by sensible and moderate advisors, he gradually acquired the liberal views of a consummate states- man. His best councillors in this regard were Abul Fazl Faizi, Todarmal, Birbal, Bhagawandasa, and Mansingh, each one an as- tute visionary who could look into the future, and consolidate an empire built on the goodwill of an efficient government.

He was the first of the Islamic rulers in India who had accepted and appreciated the fact that India was to be his home, and the Indian people, his own people. Even the mighty English failed to administer by this concept, and was consequently exposed to imperialistic insensitivity. Akbar regarded himself as a ruler first, and a Muslim later.

III

Thus Varanasi experienced a welcome respite. But that respite also implied that raising new temples, or repairing old ones would not be attempted. Eventually Varanasi remained without a Visvanatha shrine for nearly a hundred years. (Varanasi had grown accustomed to do without shrines like Omkara, Krttivasa, Kalesvara, Avimukte- svara, Madhyamesvara, etc.)

Between 1545 and 1554 under his father's command Varanasi had been under the direct charge of Akbar himself, but by 1555

Humayun had taken over from his son. In 1556 Humayun died in an accident, and Akbar ascended the throne.

History knows that it took some time for Akbar to come to his own after overcoming the stiff opposition of Raja Hemcandra (Hemu), and then cynically by-passing his own mentor Bairam Khan. In overcoming these early challenges to his legitimacy he was much helped by the House of Ambar.

He showed his gratitude to the Hindu lobby of his court, but he did not forget to keep one of his eyes deliberately fixed against a possible Hindu revival. Nevertheless shrines had again started to be built all over Varanasi.

By 1580 the Hindu community of Varanasi (and of India) profited from a remarkable well versed Brahmin by the name of Narayana Bhatta. Many of his books are still extant. The one named Tirtha Kalpataru has already been mentioned.

He advised Todarmal to educate Akbar in favour of secular polity in a country which nursed, homed and developed some of the oldest faiths of human history.

If he had an interest in settling himself as a successful and popular monarch, he had to cultivate and practise the correct monarchi- cal temperament. He had to assume a liberal and philosophic attitude, and prove by example that he meant to follow a strong, just and liberal policy worthy of a central monarch in the land of India. He had to prove himself righteous to all his subjects. He could not afford to neglect the major section of the people in favour of a minority community even if that community happened to belong to his own faith.

The greatest challenge of the Mughals, surprisingly, did not come from the Hindus. It came from their co-religionists, the

never-say- die Afghans, who felt that their hard-earned suzerainty had been usurped by and opportunist team of 'Foreigners', the never-do-good wild and hated Mughals from Chinese Turkestan.

Seven Strong Pathan-Afghan monarchies had already become entrenched in large tracts of India such as Gujarat, Bengal, and parts of the Deccan. These together posed a serious challenge to the young emperor.

This murderous clash between communities of the same faith gives a lie to the theory that the inter-community wars had been based on religious differences. Religion was a camouflage used by crafty self-seekers to arouse the euphoria of the simple-minded mass, who really provides the human fodder for all battles forced by power and greed.

In order to overcome that powerful challenge he badly needed cooperation from the equally powerful Hindus, who could create a lot of mischief by joining the Afghans, or by under cutting, in their own interest, the emperor's attempts to overcome the Afghan power.

The Hindus provided important guard and assistance to the emperor. Todarmal's advice, and Beharimal's offer of the hands of his daughter under his own terms, as a proof of Akbar's sincerity for the Hindu cause, made the young emperor see wisdom in the policy. He married Jodhabai, Beharimal's daughter, with great eclat. The Hindu princess was offered the highest position in the harem, and her son was to become the heir to the imperial throne.

The new policy secured for the young emperor a great political advantage inasmuch as his cabinet consisting of the heads of

influential Hindu Houses acted practically as a 'brain trust' of the ablest and best in India for the ablest and the best of Muslim monarchs of India.

This wise move counteracted a possible alliance of the Hindus and the hated Pathans. He needed badly a genuine Hindu confidence in his just policy towards the Hindu cause.

In contrast, the Hindu policy of the Pathans, even of such learned rulers as Iltutmish, Mohammad Tughlaq and Firoz Shah Tughlaq did not in any way build up the Hindu confidence. The Pathans were always regarded as 'foreigners' due to their anti-Hindu stance.

This was due to the fact that the Islamic structure built by the Afghans got stuck to a fundamentalist diehard group of mullahs. Their orthodox influence proved to be more important than the liberal directives of the ruler of the land. The fall of the only female monarch of Delhi, Raziya Sultana is a case in point. The mullah lobby always stood directly in the way of Delhi's liberal policy, and indirectly in winning a desirable confidence of the Hindu majority.

What could Aurangzeb not have achieved for his dynasty, as well as for Hindustan, if instead of the mullah lobby he had stuck to a Dara-ist pursuit of the great principle of secularism?

IV

Young Akbar realised early, the wisdom of learning from the funda- mentalism of his predecessors; and this established the very basis of his success as a great ruler. Akbar got himself freed from the mullah- dominance as a matter of imperial policy.

Whenever a cause presented itself as a challenge, even learned rulers like Kaikobad, Iltutmish, Mohammad Tughlaq, or Firuz Shah Tughlaq behaved no better than the petty fanatic upstart local governors. Court intrigues and pressures made them succumb to fanaticism.

The Pathan governor of Jaunpur, Mohammad Sharqui, was a specimen. He was no more than a title-holder of the Imperial court: but he acted on his own as a fanatic upstart caring little for a central policy.

The misguided enthusiasm of these subsidiary governors, and their excesses promoted by the mullah bigots had done enough damage to alienate the Hindu psyche from the confidence that the central rule could have provided.

Akbar was keen on guarding against such a damaging policy.

In- stead he was advised to promote a stable confidence in the supposed righteousness of the justice of the Muslim rule. He wanted to extend and establish a central Delhi-power ruling over the Indian subcontinent reminding of the Hindu days of the Mauryas, the Guptas, and the Kusaṇas.

Akbar entertained the vision of a united India brought under a central government with scales of revenue clearly defined and fixed, and free the ryots from fiscal pressure put on them by the whims of local lords. He protected the accused from a system of lengthy and oppressive justice. He wanted to eliminate any type of discrimina- tory treatment of his subjects.

Akbar was not a learned man of letters. He did not have time to study quietly as a child. He was a man who, like John Stuart Mill, did not have a childhood. He was over-spoilt, headstrong, rough and determined to the point of tyranny and absolutism.

But he was gifted with a natural genius, because of which, and with his very extensive natural receptive intelligence, he learned much more from a galaxy of talents (like Vikramaditya before him, and Napoleon Bonaparte after him) which he had collected in his court.

The most reliable luminaries in this galaxy was Raja Todarmal, the converted genius Mian Tansen, Raja Bhagawandasa (son of Raja Beharimal) whose aunt Jodhabai was married to the Emperor. She eventually became the mother of the next Emperor Jahangir.

Thus Akbar was the first Muslim ruler of India who saw the wis- dom of ruling over a population of Hindus without having to apply irritants. The sagacity of this policy was materially reflected in his fiscal policy whereby he ordered to stop several discriminatory col- lections imposed on the Hindus. The exchequer gained much more from this liberalisation, and the reassured Hindus granted him the necessary respite to deal with the formidable Afghan sovereignties like Malwa, Gujarat and the princes of the Deccan, most of which were ruled by his co-religionists.

The complete reorientation of the Hindu policy by Akbar strengthened the hold of the Mughals on the Hinduland.

These considerations, together with his complete and innate grasp of the nature of politics in India, made Akbar issue several grants to the Hindus. He stopped the hated pilgrim-tax for the Hindus, and the still more hated jizya, a poll-tax, which a Muslim ruler was re- quired by shariat to collect from an infidel.

Such liberalism of policy was actually advised by his philosopher teacher Abdul Latif, who advised him in favour of Sulh-i-kul (Policy- of Universal Toleration). No other Muslim ruler had followed be- fore, or would thereafter follow this policy with as much application as Akbar.

When he was yet young, and belonged to an impressionable age, he put down with a strong hand forces trying to keep him under a vigilant surveillance. His strict, prompt and determined steps quelled all opposition. He did not hesitate to kill with a blow of his bare fist a defiant officer, the son of his foster mother, because of his murderous rebellion. He chalked out early his own policy of Sulh-i-kul. It took a lot of courage for the young prince to stand firmly against the law of the shariat, and the opposition of the mullahs.

This made him order in favour of the reconstruction of the beleaguered shrines and ruined temples of Varanasi.

This single act of masterly statesmanship aroused the confidence of Hindu India. Never before the Hindus had received such en- couragement from a foreign ruler.

His mind was now free from thoughts of a Hindu opposition. He could set his eyes on the belligerent and strong Afghan opposition still surrounding his immediate sphere of influence.

Over the centuries the Afghans had been accustomed to consider India as their legitimate prize. They would not easily relinquish their hard earned rights to a group of Trans-Oxan Ferganites, who were nothing more than a pack of adventurers in their eyes.

Akbar the Great Mughal had yet to prove his birthright in the land of his birth.

But for Akbar's wise policy of by-passing useless fundamental fanaticism, and befriending by his liberalism the general mass, he would not have been marked as one of the Great rulers of world history.

V

In 1580 Akbar inflicted a final and telling defeat on the Afghans of Bihar at Mungher. This offered a psychological moment. Using the good offices of such influential courtiers as Bhagawandasa and Todarmal, Narayana Dutt, the crafty and learned Brahmin, made a move. He availed of this opportunity to impress on Akbar the use- fulness and importance of issuing a relaxation for reconstructing Varanasi.

The ancient Varana front had been devastated beyond redemption. Yet Temples of the 'Great Five', and Bindumadhava made a partial recovery. But the hills along the Ganga could be developed, and an entire new city could be modelled to the great joy of the Hindus. The emperor would by one single stroke be able to crystallise the entire Rajwada, and possibly Marathawada too. Narayana Dutt impressed on the Emperor the wisdom of such a move.

Sikandar Lodhi had destroyed the whole of Varanasi (1494),

and Akbar permitted a general reconstruction in 1580. In order to mark specially his condescension in favour of the Hindu subjects, he him- self contributed a sum of 45,000 gold dinars towards the expenses of building the Visvanatha shrine.

Once the Emperor's grant became public knowledge, the rich and the poor of India, the Hindu princes and rich merchants showered money on the project.

Varanasi collected all resources to take advantage of this welcome respite. A series of temples, hitherto left in ruins, came into their Own

Pandit Narayana Dutt got busy. He urged the Hindu diehards to relax and forget orthodox restrictions regarding reuse of premises defiled by Mlecchas. He quoted scriptures, and advised the community to use the same premises, and reconstruct new temples on the ruins of the old.

Following the Pandit's advice the temples of Krttivasesvara, Mahakalesvara, Madhyamesvara and Omkaresvara were reinstated in their respective berths hitherto left barren and desolate.

In this recovery, of course, Avimkutesvara and Visvesvara demanded priority.

Visvanatha, as we know, was not accorded the position of the supreme deity of Varanasi which He enjoys now. That position was awarded to Avimukteswara, for Krttivasesvara and Omkaresvara, particularly the first one.

The sudden elevation in the ranking of Visvanatha as the supreme deity of Varanasi, in supercession of the great deities mentioned in the scriptures, has its own history.

VI

The alien wreckers so far had made a more or less thorough job of the destruction of the main temples lying between the Varana and the two lakes, the Mandakini and the Macchodari. That area was the heart-throb of the Varanasi town, and the temples stood up to its reputation. The destructions had been thorough.

It was impossible, therefore, to lay hands on all these ruins simultaneously. As such Pandit Narayana Dutt must have thought it wise and practical to concentrate on the great hill, and Jnanavapi.

But this area too, as we have noted, was reduced to a filthy, stinky, abominable rubble heap, where centuries of accumulating refuse had completely blown out its proverbial beauty, grandeur and sanctity.

To Narayana Dutt the reclamation of Jnanavapi was of supreme importance. He checked the mosque of Raziya on the hill, and realised that it could not be touched at all. The idea of building on the hill was abandoned immediately.

The next best place was obviously the southern bank of the Jnanavapi, adjacent to the great temple of what had been once the Avimuktesvara on the one side, and the famous immemorial banyan tree, the Akşayavata on the other. The debris had over-flowed that area too. In fact the sloping filth had flowed down to the very brinks of what had once been the waters of the Jnanavapi, and had almost choked and throttled it.

The architects planned to remove the mess, and utilise it to bring it up to a level with the road that bordered the hill then crowned by the Raziya Mosque. History records that the platform of the newly built temple was brought to a level with the road. (This platform could still be seen.)

In any case Jnanavapi could not recover fully its past watery expanse. That lake of crystal clear surface, which 'reflected as on a mirror the golden towers of the temple', was for ever choked.

There could have been another reason for erecting the Visvanatha temple in preference to the other more important temples.

The site of the ancient city and the business centre had shifted from the Rajghat-Macchodari-Varanã area to further south. The population was coming to the southern banks of the Varana, and the Mandakini. Sarnath was entirely abandoned. Thus the temple on the hill came closer to the heart of the town.

Like Jnanavapi, the Macchodari too must have been defiled enough, so that a free movement of the river traffic had become rather hazardous. New trade routes hugging the land connected Varanasi with the famed cities of Gaur and Pandua.

Thus the area between the southern banks of the Macchodari and the Visvanatha hill developed into the busiest centre of Varanasi.

This could have been another reason why Narayana Dutt's atten- tion was focused on the reconstruction of Avimuktesvara temple, and put the Visvanatha lingam in the central sanctuary.

Reconstruction also took place restoring the famous pitr tirtha of Varanasi, known in the scriptures as Barkarikunda (Bakariakuṇḍa). So much importance was attached to this tank that Hindu princes from all over India vied with each other to raise carved temples all around the tank, which was paved and terraced all around. Artistically carved pillars and plaques adorned the richly embellished con- structions. Here the sculptors of one part of India vied and competed with those of another part.

It is sad that due to the utter negligence of the city fathers (and the earlier English Collectors) a great museum of Indian art was

allowed to be pilfered away through naked hooliganism for the ille- gal and provoking purpose of embellishing later mosques, private houses, and catering for the fancies of powerful satraps whose boor- ish way of functioning cared little for the values of art, or the sus-ceptibilities of a devout people.

On the banks of the Mandakinitalab, which had been alive, and receiving waters from the Mandakini channel, and which spread its watery blessings over an area of more than a hundred acres, two shrines were allowed to come up: one, the ancient Ganesa temple known as Dantahasta (K. Kh.), popularly known as Bara Ganess a shrine on the hill by the tank, known as Go- raksatilla, where a memorial for the famous Natha Yogi Jalandhara-natha still receives regular attention.

While these remains still mark the south-western bank of the Talab, its north-western bank was marked by a market of spices, Katra Dinanatha. Adjacent to the Katra, and near Maidagin, stood a Devi temple. The only heir to the Talab of Mandakini on this south-western part is a stinking dying tank which reminds us of the southern limits of the Mandakini.

At about this time a new Kalabhairava-temple was constructed after the old one was abandoned as completely ruined.

palanquins, rare gems, 'howdah-s' for elephants and embellishments for special processions were displayed here.

These last were used for public views, and the secretariat for collecting gifts and enlisting them was also situated here.

The temple base was seven feet high. The walls, more than three feet in thickness, were mostly bare, lest any decorations irritate Muslim susceptibilities. The main sanctum sanctorum, or the 'nave' of the shrine had the same measurement of 124 sq.

as had been the shrine of the old temple. But the actual lingam was fixed at the centre of a Gauripattam made of gold, and around it a 32' sq. argha (kunda-dugout cavity) secured the actual jaldhari or puja well. A final wall railing 7' high running around the argha protected the lingam fixed at the centre of the arghã, or kunḍam.

With this sanctum sanctorum was attached four ante-chambers used as shrines for other deities. These attached alter-rooms measured 16' x 10'. Next to these stood links 12' x 8' which led to the halls already mentioned.

The east-west entrances were 'protected' by images of Ganas or Yaksa guards. Yakasas and Gandharvas were imperative adjuncts to Siva temples according to convention. But because of Islamic susceptibility the guards were securedly placed 'above' the doors, be- yond immediate detection, or reach.

The four corners of the temple housed four more shrines each 12' sq.

Remarkably enough the image of the 'Bull', or 'Nandi', the honoured ride of Siva, and a contribution from His Majesty, the King of Nepal, had been kept as usual immediately in front of the main gate. It was not molested in subsequent raids. The impressive ani- mal was left alone. This very bull now occupies a prominent place in the yard of Jnanavapi. The poor animal is made to stare helplessly at the mosque for no apparent reason.

Yet a reason is not far to seek. The original temple on the hill, lies quite in front of the bull. By assuming this position the faithful Nandi recalls his former loyalty to the Lord on the hill. The Bull's position has since been shifted again and again, but the loyal ani- mal still looks on in dumb bewilderment those

millions of devotees who throw water and offerings before it, without ever sharing its grief for a lost glory.

Indeed Varanasi reserves a special gift of stamina, a kind of determined obstinacy, to be able to rise Sphinx-like from its ashes again and again.

The new temple tower rose 125 ft. high. All the five towers were crowned with pure gold steeple-domes (kalasa). These steeple domes fixed as crowns over all sikhara-s (conical towers) made the temple rise yet further 64' and 48' (the smaller height belonged to the four subsidiary, sikharas of the temple on four sides of the central one).

The inner circumambulation pathway, which ran around the tem- ple, but away from common and public view, had on its walls carved images of various mythological deities carefully tucked away from open view.

VII

We have been talking about the reconstruction of the seventeenth century, temple of Visvanatha.

But Akbar's liberal sanction served a far more important and aesthetic purpose so far as the beautification of the great city was concerned.

Mansingh and Todarmal were quick and clever enough to make the best use of the royal permission as fast as they could. And what they achieved stands to this day as a magnificent waterfront unbeat- able anywhere on earth be it Venice, Potomac, or Hongkong. (Of this later on.)

In no time at all the length and breadth of Hindu India was alerted, and the goodwill of the princes was concretely

demonstrated through a spurt of feverish building activity along the river bank.

To the perpetual glory of Akbar's sense of polity, beauty, toleration and benevolence, the riverside of Varanasi was cleared of the muddy, hanging, shingly banks, and was paved, sealed and bound by chased sand-stones, stubborn firm pillars, flights of terraces and tiaras after tiaras of skilful architectural temples and palaces rising stage by stage-, piercing the skies.

It is a pleasure to recall that the fame of the river-side of

Varanasi springs piercing the skies.

It is a pleasure to recall that the fame of the river-side of

Varanasi springs from the liberal gesture of a monarch who wanted to win the hearts of his subjects, and who regarded religion as a personal factor, as different from governance, which is a public charge. The truly religious minded go by principles of ethics, than by the fetters of priest-laid commandments.

From Kedara ghat to Pancaganga ghat the crescent curve of the river at Varanasi presents a spectacle for the world of tourists, devotees, architects, photographers, painters, even poets for wonderment, awe, praise. All of them pay due homage in their favoured medium to this achievement of the collective effort of man.

We have spoken of this breath-taking beauty time and again,

and time and again we shall come back to it: for the sheer beauty of the Varanasi ghats bears repetition.

The Taj in India is rightly regarded as a wondrous achievement. So are the Varanasi ghats, which no traveller ancient or modern has failed to praise.

Discerning tourists and travellers from all over the world over the centuries have been praising the grand spectacle of Hindu architecture which still dazzle the eyes in spite of the squalor that an intimate contact with Varanasi could expose.

Venice with its towering waterfront, or London with its serpentine spectacle of buildings along the Thames cannot compare with the crescent bank elevation climbing up and up in terraced serenity, heaving high to embrace the skies. Flights upon flights of well- dressed sandstone stairs reaching polished stone-girt palaces and cupolas, and stretches of green bordered balconies, run their course for about two kilometres of a hill range. The spectacle forces the mind to picture a congealed representation of human aspirations crystallised in sunbathed realities. Varanasi's panoramic river-side actually represents dream flights of human invocation to the un- seen cosmic powers, which man helplessly calls 'the Divine'. Steps of the river-side galleries of Varanasi raise paens in stone in praise of the Divine spirit.

Aesthetic and romantic satisfaction apart, the very engineering skill of running these hundreds of steps from the top of the hills to the depths of the mighty running river against a formidable current that could wash away the cranky shingles from their beds, even judged by modern standards, is stunning.

Any one who has experienced Udaipur and Lake Pichola, or the many 'Sagars' (extensive embankments) of Rajasthan, bordered with magnificently raised palaces, could appreciate in miniature the skill that tightened the lose singles of the Varanasi hills into a solid mass held together by iron clamps that bind tight the three to five ton stone flags. Nowhere in the world an entire hill-side has been held together by iron clamps

and lead-mouldings to provide enough strength to structural magnitude that time could not either wear out, nor nature shake.

All this has been the handiwork of Varanasi, or Kasi-Kosala ma- sons and stone sculptors known locally as 'Santaras', a tribe specially skilled in stone-work. (sang stone + tarash = cleaners, carv- ers: Sangtarash or Santaras = stone-masons.) They are a class by themselves, still itching for displaying their traditional skills.

Their talent was used by the Rajasthan princes, as also by the princes from Maharashtra, and deep-southern potentates. These last came later after a century. But Emperor Akbar's liberal policy brought together the Rajwada princes to do their very best, and take advantage of the sudden reprieve granted by the supreme ruler of the country. The Hindu's, after centuries, rose like a compact family, and changed the very face of Varanasi.

The city known in mythological history as Varanavati, or Varana- sya, a city that 'faced' the Varana, now faced the expansive sand banks stretching on the east. The city that was the pride of Rajghat, Işipattana and the popular market places around Macchodari and Mandakini now forgot its pristine roots, and faced straight the great Ganga, and greeted every morning a rising sun peeping through the green woods of the eastern bank, known as Ramnagar.

What we see today (1990) along the Ganga has consumed years of human efforts and enterprise. The picturesque did not come at once. It came up by stages. If the Varanasi hills had been completely covered with a green foliage, if the hills, because of their magnifi- cent forestry were regarded as Anandakananam, and if at the same time the stark barren banks had been known

as Mahasmasana, then it could be inferred that the old city hugged both the banks of the Varana in the south, and had almost nothing to do with the city banks outside the Visvesvarakhanda. The modern city is but the extension of the former wooded hermitages, developed by sages.

In the ancient classical days the hillside was bare of buildings, because people were required not to build. We have noted that it was forbidden for house-holders to build permanent residences there. (Was it due to fear from the Ganas?)

The banks, therefore, were completely bare of any urban embel- lishments. On the banks here and there, bizzare stark ash-laden, animal infested funeral stretches lay about, and because of the fu-neral grounds, here and there, clusters of habitations, occupied by the Bhara-Sivas, Guhyakas, Yaksas, Ganas, undertaken of all descriptions settled all around. Most of them lived the life of roaming tribes.

The embellishment, which we so admire along the river front could have appeared only 'after' the hills were urbanised. The ur- ban population must have found it necessary to use the rivers. Natu- rally, easy and safe 'access-steps' to the river became an imperative requirement. And these were provided by charitably minded afflu- ent princes.

So the first stair-cases and the first buildings must have come up only 'after' the Buddha, and by Kaniska's time all the hills were expected to have come alive.

Yet the skill of the engineers of the time was not expected to prove equal the task of building the magnificent ghats.

These had come up still later. K. Kh., K. Mhtm., Agni P., Matsya P., Siva P., so eloquent about the beauties of Varanasi, do not men- tion the stone clapped ghats of Varanasi.

Dasasvamedha, Pancaganga and Manikarnika have been mentioned again and again together with Cakratirtha, and many other holy tanks. But the approach to these bathing places on the river have not been mentioned, neither do they mention the impressive flight of stairs. The access to the river of the hoary past was in all probability as rough and tumbled as natural habitats are expected to be.

Those special bathing sites, described in K. Kh. and K. Mhtm., must have been associated with valleys watered by numerous channels flowing to the main river. The course of the channels, one could imagine, must have found easier passages to the river.

Dasasvamedha was situated on the Prayag (confluence), where Godavari and Ganga met: Pancaganga, likewise was the meeting place of channels known as Kirana, and Dhūtapapa. Even Mani- karnika was situated on a similar confluence of the Ganga and Brahmanala, now untraceable.

Brahmanala was an independent channel, meeting the Ganga at Manikarnika, making an access way easy. Of course Varana was eas- ily accessible, as there was no really steep climb here. No mention appears in the old classics about bathing tirtha's along the river south of Dasasvamedha (due most probably, to the raw steep hill climb).

The point is, that the necessity of setting stairs against the banks became imperative when the hills were cleared, and people began to settle.

This was obviously not required before the Aryan push had started, and before the Gahadavalas moved in to fortify the Rajghat fort. (In between a cool period of about 4000 years gone down the Ganga.)

There is no evidence that the building of the Varanasi ghats had started in a big way before the call from Akbar had been announced. If there had been any, we have no sure records. Here have been ancient ghats. But these, like Ghora ghat in 1905, were just shingle and dirt access-ways sloping or tumbling precipitately to the river banks. That the pilgrims used some convenient approaches to the river is obvious in view of the fact that bathing in the Ganga, and uses of the Ganga as a waterway for river transport has been as old as the hills themselves.

These hills, as we know, are mainly built of shifting, horny shingles. No firm rock-bed formed a base for the hills. The shingles ran under the current: and the bed of the course of the Ganges at Varanasi is entirely shingly. As a result the stream had developed a current under the shingle-bed. Many think that the flow under the shingle-bed has a stronger current than the flow on the surface.

If we consider the names of these ghats one by one, and study the names of the persons who got them built, we shall come to the conclusion that the first spurt of the building of the Varanasi ghats took place at the time of Akbar, when he had announced that the Varanasi temples could be rebuilt.

The second spurt had come between 1713 and 1800 when the Marathas held sway over Delhi. Right through the period of Marathas ascendency (1713-1806) in Varanasi, from Jahandar

Shah (1713) to Shah Alam II (the unfortunate prince blinded by the Ruhilla Chief Ghulam Qadir, 1788), under the able guidance of Pandit Narayana Diksit, Brahma ghat, Durga ghat and Trilocana ghat were constructed.

Besides, several Mathas and Brahmapuris were raised by the great Narayana Dikşit. Although he later left Varanasi for his native vil- lage, the lane in which he lived is still known as Diksit or Narayana Dikşit Gali. The Maratha hold on Varanasi ended only after the Mutiny (1857).

Thereafter only a few ghats were built. The old Water-Works-ghat by Tulsi ghat happens to be one of them. It is a ghat by name alone. No direct access to the river is possible through this ghat monopolised securedly by the pumping-station. The next ghat that was built during the days of the English was the Ghora ghat.

We know that the name Ghora ghat came from the statue of a horse that could be seen even to the first decade of the twentieth century. (The author has seen this.) This equestrian statue was a memorial to the Gahadavala horse-sacrifice performed at Dasa- svamedha (q.v.). The statue was removed by the English adminis- tration sometime when the Ghora ghat got paved in stone.

In the meanwhile a number of ghats remained unmetalled hang-ing precariously in loose cascading debris. Some of the ghats, of course, were too ancient, and became dilapidated due to total dis- repair. Over the long years these stood as monuments to the cynical attitude of the merchant-servants, and culture-brags of the mighty East India Company. The swaggering nonsense

took a turn only with the earnest commiserations of Princep, Sherring and Curzon.

The Government of the time had decided to allow the ghats to meet their 'destiny' in course of time.

The national government of free India decided to put order into this chaos. The descending rubbles were held back, by sealing off the surface. Only a few ghats had been reconstructed, like Bhonsala ghat, Pandeya ghat, Scindia ghat, etc. Of the newly built ghats one is Mã Anandamayi ghat, perhaps an encroachment on the old Tulsi ghat, which too got some attention along with Causatthi ghat. Darbhanga ghat was provided with stairs after the World War I.

Between Akbar and Jahandar Shah there have been important Mughal emperors who made both positive and negative contributions to the ups and downs of Varanasi.

Jahangir had sent to Varanasi a Governor by the name of Agha Noor, whose harassment of the wealthy of Varanasi made them flee the city until Agha Noor himself was recalled to Agra.

But those who are interested in the social history of Varanasi during the time of Emperor Jahangir would profit from a study of the records left by one, Ralph Fitch (1583-91), a traveller with a keen sense of observation of social norms.

From Fitch we come to know of the following ghats: Rajghat, Brahma ghat, Durga ghat, Bindumadhava ghat, Mangala Gauri ghat, Rama ghat, Trilocana ghat, Agnisvara ghat, Nagesvara ghat, (now known as Bhonsala ghat,), Viresvara ghat, Siddha Vinayaka ghat, Svargadvara Pravesa, Moksadvara Pravesa (both now absorbed in the popular Manikarnika ghat complex) Jarasandha ghat, later named as Mir ghat in the name of Mir

Rustam Ali, a Muslim Collec- tor of Varanasi (q.v.), who had built a mini fort-like structure, the ruins of which could still be detected; Buddhaditya ghat, Somesvara ghat, (another Somesvara ghat further south, past Catuḥsasthi ghat, is now known as Parray, or Pandeya ghat), Ramesvara ghat, (near Man Mandir), Lolarka ghat (this one has now been almost totally deleted by the Water-Works-buildings raised during the British rule), Asi Sangam ghat, (this one balanced off, as if, the northern Varana Sangam ghat, both having no metalled approach to the river). Dasasvamedha ghat was there, along with Prayag ghat. But with the reconstruction of Ghoda ghat its feature have now been changed. The welcome change in fact was made possible through the keen- ness of the bureaucracy only too anxious to afford facilities to white 'sight-seers' to get an easy (and not so embarrassing) approach to the river front. There was a Sarvesvara ghat near Pandeya ghat, but it has since been buried under the avalanche of the old ruins. Equally sad is the condition of what is still known as the Manasarovar ghat. Raja Mansingh of Akbar's court had restored the ancient Manasa- rovar, and decorated the tank with a running covered verandah on all its four sides. On four sides of the tank there were four temples, and one in the middle. All this is now only a memory. We recall with interest that the ruination of this tank, as of a dozen others, had been brought about by cynical Hindus who continue to bring to ruination many more tanks. The apathy of the local body had added fuel to fire, destruction to pillage.

Kedara ghat is old, but its modern shape was given during the time of the Mughals. The Kumaraswami Math near Kedara was founded at the time of Akbar.

Along with Kedara ghat several other ghats have been mentioned in an inscription of Govindachandra, the Gahadavala King. This shows that the Gahadavalas were conscious of embellishing the hilly Varanasi. They took care for arranging well-built approaches from the hill-heights to the river. Besides Lolarka, Adikesava, Vedesvara, Koţitirtha (near Kapiladhara), Trilocana and Svapnesvara (adjacent to Kedara ghat), the Gahadavalas had made extensive provisions for the maintenance of such temples and bathing pools as Lolarka and Visvanatha. For a comparative study of the construction of ghats we have to wait until the last chapter.

Since the policy of Akbar and Jahangir had annoyed the mullahs, they appealed to Shah Jahan to adopt a firmer policy befitting Is- lam's glory towards the infidels. Shah Jahan circulated a farman that the completed temples of Varanasi could be retained, but those of the temples which are in the process of being built should not be completed. Indeed they should be demolished completely.

During Shah Jahan's time his eldest son Dara Shukoh was appointed the governor of Allahabad. Varanasi fell under his govern-ance. Since Dara was much interested in Hindu philosophy, he decided to shift his residence to Varanasi, and cultivate, under proper guidance, a subject he admired most. The area in which he lived has since been known as Daranagar. He chose this area after good deliberations. It was close to the famed temple of Krttivasesvara. As such it had been a haunt of learned professors in Hindu philoso- phy. Then came the age of the bigoted emperor Aurangzeb, and Varanasi's woes increased as never before. And with that the woes of the empire

began. The downward slide of the empire started from Aurangzeb's (a) religious policy, and (b) Deccan policy.

Over the years young Aurangzeb had developed a 'Dara-Complex'. The complex was unfortunately caused by Shah Jahan's dot- ing on his eldest son to the neglect of others, and as well by Dara's having a wife (Udaipuri) whom the peeved prince regarded as too beautiful for a heretic's possession.

This had made him critical of Dara, specially of his philosophical sophistication, which he had inherited from the policies of Akbar, and his Din-e-Ilahi. Since Aurangzeb finally had seen the end of Dara on the score of heresy, it was expected that he would turn into a bigot with the support of the mullahs, and see an end to Daranagar, Kṛttivasa, Varanasi and Hinduism. This was a vendetta in active pur- suit.

To prove that he was in earnest about his determination for establishing and propagating Islam, he made it a point to take all steps to humiliate the infidels according to the shariat. Of these steps destruction of temples was one. He wanted to correct the 'in- discretion' of the second, third, and fourth Mughals with a stub- born will, and an iron hand. He stopped the reconstruction of Varanasi, and demolished all the temples, inclusive of the Visvanatha temple (of Narayana Dutt-fame), Avimuktesvara, Krttivasa, Omkara, Mahakala, Madhyamesvara, Barkarikunda and the great temple of Benimadhava at Pancaganga. Varanasi groaned after a hundred years of reasonable respite. Even minor temples and tanks were not spared. The entire Macchodari-Mandakini complex was in a shambles.

So devastating was the result that a sad social change came over the people of Varanasi. Hatred against the community of Islam,

hitherto restricted to the foreigners alone, became institutionalised. The converts and the bevy of the molested girls around the temples not only became alienated, but the transferred community gradually developed an anti-Hindu stance which has not proved helpful to the social health of the commune of Varanasi, or that of India. Blood is a good binder running through the veins, but once spilt, it breeds unbridgeable barriers of hatred and vengeance. Aurangzeb, though a fanatic in religious matters, was not too desperate and unwise as a ruler. His patience gave out because he found himself suddenly and badly infested by the princes of Rajwada and Maharashtra. As a matter of policy at this juncture he wanted to show his 'considerate' hand, however reluctantly, to the oppressed. He wanted to check his overzealous officers. We quote a farman from Aurangzeb dated 28 February, 1659:

It has been decided according to the laws of the shariat that the old temples of Varanasi could be retained, but no new temple shall be raised. My Government has been informed that some officers of the Government have started causing difficulties for the people of Varanasi and its environs, and specially to the Brah- mins who offer daily prayers in temples. They want to stop them from doing so. This farman is being circulated to stop this, and make special arrangements for guarding their rights in future, for ensuring that the rights of these people (for offering worship in their own way) shall not be disturbed.

It should be remembered in this context that the temple of Kṛttivasa was destroyed in 1659, and the Alamgiri Mosque was raised in its place the same year.

So much for an Alamgiri relaxation.

After he received an un-imperial snub from the crafty Shivaji, who had escaped from his intrigued and foul imprisonment in Delhi, Aurangzeb's ire against the Hindus came out in full force causing terrible devastations.

By September 1669 the Visvanatha temple was demolished, and a farman was issued to the effect that the Sanskrit schools of Varanasi be closed, and all Hindu books be burnt. (The Dara-complex was working against Hindu books and learning.)

The temple of Bindumadhava came next. A new mosque constructed on the site of the celebrated temple, and its minars became outstanding landmarks for the city of Varanasi.

So magnificent was this temple, rising high and noble atop the high hill by the river, destruction was condemned by even Christian travellers. They were shocked at the cynical Islamic disregard to a creation of beauty.

As a note on the elegant minars (now no more) it may be observed that the original Bindumadhava temple had elegant towers of great beauty with a central place covered with gold. When the temple was destroyed, and a mosque was planned as a challenge, equally impressive minars had to be created. The minars of the Aurangzeb mosque on the Ganga became admirable landmarks until these fell down due to age. (Now, there are no minars. Time has wrought them down.)

The social condition of Varanasi, as that of India, at the time of Aurangzeb has very well been described in the journals of the two French travellers, Francis Bernier and Jean Francis Tavernier. Both are eloquent in their praise of the commerce of Varanasi, and specially for its silk merchandise. We are specially grateful to them for remarking that the main city of

Varanasi occupied the northern end of the river. This means that until 1707 the hills of Varanasi, specially the two northern hills had retained their arboreal tranquillity.

Tavernier describes the Bindumadhava temple in picturesque details, because the magnificence of this temple had astounded him, as did the pillar of Asoka amidst the cluster of Hindu temples close to the Macchodari. This pillar was destroyed in the communal dis- turbances of 1809.

In the waning days of the Mughal court the governance of Benares came under the care of the Nawabs of Lucknow, who patronised the Shia community, and as such were less bigoted. Under the Nawabs, one Mir Rustam Ali, who was a patron of arts, and who left behind him the reputation of a liberal ruler of Varanasi had started a post-Holi celebration (celebrations welcoming the advent of spring) named Burhwa Mangala in which both the communities, took sincere parts. He seriously encouraged the cultivation of the Hindu-Muslim fraternity, which was one of his chief aims in efficient administration. It was he who had constructed a fort, near the Man-Mandir ghat. Mir ghat still bears the name of this liberal ruler. The present fort of Ramnagar was built by Balvant Singh, King of Benares from out of the material collected from the broken fort of Mir Rustam Ali.

If we now take a look at the southern section of Varanasi on the Ganga, south of Pancaganga and Manikarnika, we have to admit that we owe to Rustam Ali a great deal for this southern development.

His officer Mansa Rama, and Balwant Singh, who had acquired the title of the King of Benares from Emperor Mohammad Shah

(1719) helped to develop the city on the hills. What we now know as Varanasi, the crescent township wearing a picturesque tiara of ter- raced buildings, is largely a contribution of this period. What we see now as Varanasi from the river south of Pancaganga is almost entirely a contribution from the Marathas, whose activities spread from 1712, and reached their climax in 1795. (This has been discussed in detail in a later chapter.)

The Marathas were supreme in Varanasi between 1734 and 1789 when they had the Mughal court under the thumb. Several letters have been discovered to show how the Marathas always thought of 'freeing' the tristhali' (Ayodhya, Varanasi and Prayag) but after the disaster at the Battle of Panipat (1761) they had to play at a lower key, and did not actually press for a confrontation. Tristhali was never acquired.

But they had yet enough power to do little bits by way of public work. Several ghats, many mathas and brahmapuri-s were constructed during this time.

We have already mentioned Brahma ghat, Durga ghat and Trilocana ghat which were constructed at the instance of Narayana Diksit. Mangala Gauri ghat, Dalpat ghat, and Balaji ghat were constructed during the days of Maratha supremacy. The impressive Ahalya Bãi and the Rana ghat were also built about these times, and a ghat by the name of Munshi ghat was constructed by the Maratha Munshi Sridhar who was an agent for the court of Nagpur working in Varanasi.

By 1932 most of the ghats of Varanasi had been completed. A few were repaired, or reset by the National Government which

did nothing by way of constructing new ghats, and thereby lifting the face of Varanasi.

The oldest picture of the Varanasi ghats we could rest our eyes on, came from the brushes of the celebrated James Princep1 (1799- 1840) and Captain Robert Elliot (1935). By the time they were paint- ing, most of the existing ghats had been completed, along with the Pancaganga Minars.

We have talked of Narayana Diksit. He was indeed a mixture of intellect and piety, learning and service. To him Varanasi owes several of its popular and useful traditions.

After the ghats were set in stone stairs, at times running over a hundred steps (Pancaganga, Manmandir, Causatthi being some of the steepest), the clever and humane Pandit realised how difficult it would be for the young and the old to negotiate those stone steps heated under the June sun. He organised it as a religious act to have the steps covered in summer by thatched roofings. Besides, he introduced as a religious gift of public charity and service to pro- vide quay-like floating wooden spurs from the brink of the water to about fifteen or twenty feet on the river, and having them covered with thatched roofs. This afforded seats for those who wanted to pray and meditate peacefully by the river without being disturbed by the bathers, and their washings. He also introduced and encour- aged gifts of bamboo-split large umbrellas to be used as covers against rain and sun for the Gangaputras who looked after the bathers, and acted as their priests besides looking after their belongings while they bathed.

These quaint looking umbrellas have became since, thanks to Narayana Diksit, special features of the ghats of Varanasi. No

painter or photographer could miss the spectacle of these huge bamboo umbrellas which invariably intrigue foreigners.

The final result of these constructions, by stages, was that the developing southern section of the hills on the Ganga was gradually occupied by new settlers. Consequently these parts were provided with ghats during the later Mughals (under Maratha enterprise), whilst the ghats from Manikarnika to Pancaganga had been constructed rather earlier, but improved and reset later.

When we talk of the development of Varanasi, we cannot forget the name of a pair of rather forgotten widows, Ahalya Bãi of Indore and Raṇi Bhavani of Natore (1753). Bhavani's gifts to Varanasi were numerous and important. In making here gifts she had permanently changed the very aspect of Varanasi from the Dasasvamedha-point to Kedara. This does not refer to the ghats at all. This refers to the embellishment of the township along the banks of the river atop the heights of the hills. Because of a growing pressure from increas- ing population these hills had been abandoned by those who had been their primordial residents, the mendicants, yogis and the Ganas.

Most of the hills had been under the forcible occupation of Pandas, Ahirs (Milkmen, or Goalas) and anti-social rowdies.

After large scale conversion of the people of Varanasi, the fami- lies of the daily workers, artisans and artists lost their traditional livelihood (mostly attached to the temples which were now non- existent), and their very existence became precarious. They had to search for new and safer habitats where they could be free from further harassments, where they would not be irritatingly reminded of their converted status every now

and then. This had become a more touchy point in their lives during the supremacy of the Marathas. They were categorised as 'untouchables' and 'impure'. Naturally this hurt their personal dignity.

The Islamic laws had for over the centuries kept the Hindu mass under a cultural subjugation, too humiliating for them (e.g., restrictions on horse-riding, on uses of litters or palanquins, or lead- ing processions with a band of musicians, etc.). After the battle of Panipat (1761) the power of the then Delhi Government had slumped to a new low level. The Marathas took control. Under this new Hindu dispensation the Hindu population of Varanasi began to pressurise the working class, some of whom of course belonged to the Islamic faith. The converts had to look for new grounds for settlement, and chose mostly the western slopes of the hills north of the Dasasvamedha-point. The actual peaks of the hills had remained unoccupied wilds until 1761, when the Third Battle of Panipat was fought and lost. This attracted the notice of the benevolent Raṇi Bhavani of Natore. She took possession of the wide wilderness, and thought of colonising it. The abandoned wilds, and a haunt of cutthroats blossomed into a vibrant law-aiding locality of Brahmanical schools and hostels.

She ran a street (a lane really) parallel to the river and constructed houses on either sides for making gifts to the Brahmins. Thus devel- oped one of the most popular haunts of Varanasi known as Bengali- tola, closely neighboured by Jangambari, an area developed by the Jangam sannyasis of the south. The Jangamas belonged to the Vira- Saiva community established by the celebrated social reformer and philosopher-saint Vasava.

Besides this monumental undertaking Raṇi Bhavani had founded a series of temples, guest-houses, free-kitchens with a secretariat of her own along this street which gathered a reputation of charity. Several other landlords of East and West Bengal, inspired by her example and leadership established other temples with attached free kitchens, known as satras.

The hungry assembled here to collect their food dole. The lane gradually gathered popular importance, and merchants opened shops along both the sides of the narrow passage. The ever increasing number of proliferating lanes and bye-lanes soon created a bee- hive maze of habitations where thousands began to strike a colony for the old who found it most welcome to wait for their last journey to the Ultimate Beyond.

The entire area covered the wildes of the western slopes, and reached the borders of such dreaded hideouts as the Woods of Kenarama, Batuka-Bhairava, Bara Deo and Lahuria Birs, all habi- tats of the proletariat Gaṇas.

Urbanisation spread rapidly. What used to be a barren wilder-ness bloomed with an endeavouring population drawn from all over India with hopes a burning zeal, that when they are laid to dust, they would break through the perennial circle of birth and death. Soon, Varanasi already known for classical learning, became a meeting point of the most illustrious scholars in law, logic, meta-physics, classics, medicine and astronomy from Kashmir, Mithila, Tamil-land, Rajasthan, Maharashtra and West and East Bengal. The gradual development of river and rail transport helped this welcome immigration.

This shows that the city area of Varanasi from the Godhowlia-point in the west, the Dasaswamedha in the east, Asi-point in

the south and to Sigra in the south-west was non-existent before Raṇi Bhavani (1756), and Raṇi Ahalya Bãi, the dowager Holkar queen of Indore (1766-95).

The southern part of Varanasi is indeed a creation of the initiative of these two widowed ladies.

Varanasi before and after Raṇi Bhavani and Ahalya Bãi looked quite different. The list of their combined munificence to the peo- ple and state of Varanasi is a very long one. The Ahalya Bãi ghat besides Ahalya Bãi Bramhapuri are standing monuments to their religious and charitable disposition.

Her greatest and lasting gift to Varanasi is the reconstruction of the Visvanatha temple as we find it now, with its environs stretching upto the mosque. It was no easy matter to clean up the age-old rubbish and to construct the pillared pavilion with a platform for Pandits to give scriptural discourses.

The structure built under compulsions enforced by the collected rubble and debris heaped over centuries of indiscriminate devastations does credit to the ingeniousness of the architects of the time. It was impossible to remove the mountains of rubble left by centu- ries of depredations. Entire temple-complexes, quarters, gardens, minarets, copulas, pillared portions had gone to build hills of ruins. To dig them out and recapture the past being quite impossible, it was rightly decided to roll down the heaps and fill up a stinking tank. This helped to run a broad road, a lane and a specious yard. The demarcation of the Islamic mosque became defined. As much as possible, space was resurrected and a new face-lift was given to what had been condemned as 'Katwarkhana' a mount of litter, lum- ber, junk and cross. Raṇi Bhavani and Ahalya Bãi

succeeded in lift- ing a standing curse from the humiliated Hindu community.

The new temple had to be built on the banks of the Jnanavapi. years. But also, the tank had been choked and left as dead over the The tank might have been dead and buried. But the sacred water was preserved in a well, still in use.

The new temple had to be built on its bank. The southern bank was chosen. And here stands today the new Visvanatha temple constructed by Raṇi Ahalya Bai Holker. The celebrated Avimuktesvara had to find a niche. He was enshrined in the south-eastern corner of the same temple.

It was of course congested. It was an apology for the temple which had been built under the instruction of Pandit Narayana Dutt, and which had been demolished by Aurangzeb. But the poor substitute's glamour was somewhat retrieved by the gift from the great Sikh Maharaja Ranjit Singh of Punjab who covered the tower with gold platings.

Out of all this dismal history of destruction and replacements one singular detail still consoled the pious. The original boa tree situated by the southwest corner of the Jnanavapi, and mentioned in K. Kh. sprang a new foliage defying Alamgiri Royal commandments. The devotees, having lost everything, nursed this gift of nature, and the new Aksayavaṭa-shrine still shelters the ancient plant, though without the fanfare of the times gone by.

The old road to the central peak and the temple connected Jnanavapi north-south direct. The road was blocked by the dung hill of Katwarkhana. Then a bypass was cut through connecting Kacaurigali and Narayana Dutt's temple. This one

connected the temple with Manikarnika and Brahmanala. The remnants of this access are still traceable. Visalaksi having been forgotten, a new shrine of Bhavani, known as Annapurna, was constructed about this time.

Raṇi Bhavani's enterprise laid out a new access lane to the Visvanatha temple by cutting across the old Godavari channel at Dersi ke Pul. Today a new Visvanatha Lane runs north-south and spreads a branch direct east to reach the temple gate, past the Dhundi shrine as gate. The main lane however practically half-circles the ancient Jnanavapi complex, and meets the point where it crosses Tripura Bhairavi Lane (Kacaurigali), and runs down to the Manikarnika.

This part of the lane provides room to the two celebrated Yaksa shrines, which used to 'guard' the temple that Pandit Narayana Dutt had built. These are Dandapani Bhairava and Dhundiraja. The leg- end of Sambhrama and Vibhrama (q.v.) thus remains congealed in stone.

Running almost parallel to the river the new extension of the Bengalitola lane crosses the famous holy tanks of Bhutesvara and Rudrasarovara, (now a faint memory) and goes straight to Kedara.

The miserable condition of the Rudrasarovara site, and of the holy of holies, Bhutesvara, defies imagination. The sites have been thoroughly urbanised like Agastyakunda, with the largest green grocery market of the area and a most crowded shopping centre. The total demolition of these holy places was achieved under the British rule. In their anxiety to run a motorable road direct to the Ganga, the town engineers found if fit to fill up the half-choked tanks and run the city drain (underground) direct

to the river. One of the longest public-convenience-haunts was built here in contemptuous disregard of Hindu sentiments. The town refuse borne on steel carts drawn by cattle was also dumped here. Now the city fathers are try- ing to bring some order to this mischief.

On either sides of the new Bengalitola Lane the landlords and princes of the Hindu community raised dharmasalas (rest-houses), satras (open kitchens) and humble personal shrines. An entire colony of retired dowagers, pensioners, and their camp followers settled in every nook and corner of this lane. Thus the new extension of Varanasi buzzed with activities dedicated to religious pursuits. The construction by the Hindu princes of India of the series of new ghats along the Ganga, between Dasasvamedha and Asi, encouraged peo- ple to settle in this once wooded site.

Thus Raṇi Bhavani's gifts to Varanasi have immortalised her. The tanks of Lolarka, Kuruksetra, Durgakuṇḍa (with the Kapoldhara, Durga shrine), Pisacamocana, Suryakuṇḍa, Lahariatalab, Isargangi were her gifts. She paved the Pancakrosi road (50 miles), and bordered it with trees and convenient rest-houses. It was she who had cleaned and metalled the holy tanks that the Pancakrosi- pilgrims used along the way. For the government of the time, like the government before, the Hindu milieu, or its sensitive points of honour did not exist.

The new Varanasi was a gift from these two ladies and other pio- neers from Rajputana, Maharashtra and the general Hindu India.

14

The Final Blow

I

We had set out for (1) rediscovering the original city of Varanasi, and (2) account for the other extension going by that name. (3) Incidentally, we had to pay attention to (a) the changes that Varanasi was made to suffer through ages, and (b) the devastations that the alien town-builders had wrought not inadvertently, but deliberately.

In introducing the changes unfortunately they kept in view the administrative compulsions alone, feeling next to nothing about the age-old historicity, if not the sanctity, of the town. One doubts if they were competent enough to grasp the enormity of their sacred responsibility, and the colossal ignorance and blunder with which they had executed a supreme historical job.

Varanasi, the famed place mentioned in the Jatakas, when Gautama Buddha had preached scores of sermons, must have been close to what we regard today as Sarnath (Saranganatha), where at Mrgadava (also known as Isipattana) Buddha used to reside. The residential quarters must have been chosen

carefully because as a preacher, he could easily reach out for the sresthi-s, as well as the plebeians who crowded the markets.

In his life he was a big-enough man to have managed to reach both the ends of the society. And both the communes accepted him as a remarkable guide in life.

Besides the Sarnath-part of Varanasi there existed the commercial, administrative and religious Varanasi which was dominated by influential merchants and Brahmanical priests.

Sarnath would only have been a spiritual extension of Varanasi considered as an important Brahmanical Centre.

The Mahasmasana (Gauripiṭha/Radravasa) and the beautiful her- mitages of Anandakananam, of course, had been most appropriate sobriquets attached to certain parts of the city answering to those descriptions.

In order to distinguish those areas we have already marked the land formation between the Varanã and the Asi-Nala into several well defined sections.

The first section refers to the valley to the north of the Varana, stretched upto Kapiladhara (Kaithi), and Bhitri (almost 20 km away).

But is it authentic to include this section within the generally recognised limits of Varanasi?

Let us examine. We have important documentary evidence in support of our contention.

Mahabharata refers to a Varanasi standing between the Ganga, and the Gomati.

We heard of the victory of Divodasa over Haryasva and of a 'new township' established by the visitor. He named it Varanasi as a challenge to old Varanasi. In time this new township was destroyed by the Siva-Ganas, who would not tolerate the name of Varanasi being reduced to a royal parody. (M. Bh.: Anu- sasana Parva, 1899-1900). We believe that the present day Vainratha is a meek reminder of this famous town.

. There is a narrow water-link connecting Kapiladhara and the Varana, which finally reaches Vainratha and Ghazipur. Though narrow and insignificant as it now appears, the link has to be taken as an ancient one.

• Its antiquity is proved by the fact that ancient artifacts and terracottas have been discovered along the course. More importantly, coins in Brahmi script, and ancient bricks have also been collected from the site. Excavations still continue, and are full of great expectations.

Apart from the Mahabharata, the Krtyakalpataru also refers to a second Varanasi, Divodasa's Varanasi. This in all probability should be the modern Vainratha.

The point is significant for us. We have to show that between the forgotten towns of Vainratha and Bhitri, and the village of Kaithi on the one hand and the Varana on the other, the land-mass was indeed an urbanised habitation buzzing with activities of a thriving market. (A personal visit to these areas convinced the author of its great past.)

To the west of this populated land-mass stood the monasteries of Sarnath, where stood Mṛgadava, Buddha's exclusive habitat. He certainly would like to have his monastery within easy reaches of the city.

The attribution would establish one original stand that the Buddha did not preach to a wilderness. In all probability he found him- self preaching at well-populated places. In the past this land-mass had been very well populated.

If so, the question may be asked, who were responsible for devastating these habitations. Certainly no aliens did it. The area had been already turned to a wilderness long before the Muslims came to India. (This explains why the Muslims never attacked Sarnath).

The second section of the city refers to the Fort-Area, of course near the Varana-confluence.

As we know the Macchodari-Nala flowed nearby. On the hook of the 'Nala' stood a yet more ancient fort, a mud-fort, built by the Bhara-Siva clan.

The principal commercial centre of Varanasi mushroomed around the lake where riverine commerce found a safe harbour. Eversince, the most distinguished business houses and their fami- lies have been living hereabout, and this conservating part of the city is significantly called as Pakki Mahal. (The 'Mahal, or the area is, more or less, comprised of localities known as Jatanbar, Kala- bhairo, Chaukhamba, Mangala Gauri, Thatheribazar, As Bhairo, Trilocana, Kunjitola, Lachmicabūtara, etc.).

In K. Kh. this entire area, along with the series of the most distin- guished temples (Trilocana, Bindumadhava, Omkara, Kṛttivasa, Mahakala, Avimukta) has been marked as Antargṛha.

Today most of the temples are in ruins: some turned to mosques. The wrath of the wreckers and raiders had chosen this

part because of the wealth these temples amassed over the centuries. This hap- pened to be the wealthiest part of the town. Raiders swoop over where gains are profuse.

Fundamentalists draw easy conclusions against the Islamic terror, and whip up a reactionary psyche. Little do they realise that whereas these temples had indeed been ransacked, looted, dismantled and rebuilt as mosque, hundreds of them were not even touched. The point of interest was the hoarded wealth, certainly not a religious compulsion. The history of the Conquistadors in the Aztec and Inca devastations may be cited as similar cases in point. Plunder and loot was no monopoly for pirates. There were land- hugging pirates too.

The streams, tanks and the woodland of Varanasi were left un- molested. The onus of their subsequent devastations falls on the more enlightened ruling class of more modern times. They claimed that came from the cultured west.

We come to the third section of the town. This is the lake Mandakini and its environs. The river Mandakini flowing from the foothills of the central range passed through what is known now as Maidagin, and she emptied herself in the lake.

In size and natural lay out the lake used to draw admiration from all. Its gardens and beauty tempted James Princep to draw several elegant pieces of painting. The great Mandakinitalab with the steps of the temple of Bada Ganesa comes alive in his painting.

Amidst a hundred changes in Varanasi, the urban distribution of this part of the city remains almost intact to a 'T' through all the ups and downs of the ages. A picture by James Princep of the busy shopping centre of Chaukhamba would exactly fit a

photograph taken today of this section of the town. The only change would be a replacement of a horse bearing a proud merchant rider, by a mo- torbike ridden by a youth.

The area around the lake has been carefully detailed by the artist. Past the woody surroundings the minars of the Bindumadhava Mosque, the many roofs and turrets of buildings peep through. The canvas clearly brings to life a rural settlement harbouring a flourish- ing township studded with numerous high-rise buildings.

On the banks of the great lake stood the impressive temple of Bada Ganesa, a reminder to the pre-Aryan Gana days, when the forces of the Aryan intrusion were turned back with great slaughter (K. Kh. and K. Mhtm.). To prove the importance of 'Ganas' living around the lake we still find there about other non-Vedic plebeian shrines such as As Bhairon, Kall-Ma and Siva. A centre for the pre- Aryan sect of Natha-Aghoris known as Aghoranatha ki Takia was situated close to the Gorakhnathaṭila which used to stand on the brink of the lake.

If we recall the antecedents and the subsequent harassment of the saint Kabira Dasa, we would appreciate why in his wisdom he had decided to settle hereabout.

In face the north-western side of the lake was covered by marshes and jungles. To be in this area was to be out of town (sahar-ke-bahar) i.e., to be in the suburb. This was the recognised suburban area where the wealthy built their garden-houses. (Nowadays they are building the same garden-houses near the Sarnath expanse.)

In the tenth century the British records refer to the part of the lake as sahar-ke-bahar (outside the city limits). The definite

areas comprised of Jagatganj, Nate Imli, Pisacamocana, Nadessar, etc. Beyond all was forest wilds and marshy stretches.

We know that the lake had developed a commercial reputation due to the two markets on the eastern and western ends, Bissessarganj and Gola-Dinanath, which still exist in flourishing conditions.

The lake accommodated mercantile ships from the Ganga via the Macchodari channel. Loading and unloading of merchandise continued at both the markets.

Nearabout and beyond stretched the fabulous garden-houses. The well to do also maintained pleasure boats which kept contact with the lake. This was an intelligent combine of commerce and pleasure. The more famous of these garden-houses and hilly-spots were Bagia Madho Dasa, Saharbag, Palace-garden used by Nawab Wazir Ali, Gorakhnatha ka Ţilla etc. Building garden houses on the brink of the lake, and on the strip of land between the lake and the Varana used to be a hallmark of the aristocracy of the time.

To mark the frontiers of the town there still exists 'Chowk ghat', which really means a ghat, landing place for boats etc., where a toll- tax station operated. Such octroi barriers on all frontiers of the city guarded commercial interests of Varanasi.

Today the only reminders of the great lake are two miserable ponds: (1) one in the present Company-garden, and (2) the dying stinky-green grimy slush of the now indistinguishable Bulanala pond, near Bhutahi Imli.

We have spoken of the Gorakhnathaṭila. This mound, along with Bhutahi Imli and As Bhairo, by their names imply a Gana-

Bhairava haunt. The entire hilly mound, along with the elevation, where even now Bada Ganesa stands, actually stood over the lake. A number of minor temples, big and small, embellished the borders of the lake.

By implication one might infer that the beauty and popularity of this lake and tempted the people to build all along its brink. One wonders, therefore, that the habitations still standing intact, where and how did the lake disappear. How did the Nala disappear, or for that matter, how did the Macchodari lake disappear?

These had been established and recognised tirthas mentioned in the scriptural records. It becomes difficult to condone the violation of these holy spots when so much dust is raised about demolishing half a dozen temples. In fact these irremediable wanton destruc- tion must be held reprehensible by any standard of judgement.

This reminds of a very sensitive episode in the life of the Mughal Emperor Aurangzeb, known for his bigotry. The Great Mosque of Shri Nagar had been badly damaged by a terrible storm that had upset the valley. The mosque was famous for its interior work, as well as for four stately plane trees (chinar) guarding its four corners. As the aggrieved priests described the catastrophic damage to the mosques, and appealed for funds for its reconstruction, the sensitive emperor happened to ask if the chinars were safe and sound. This disturbed the holy men who asked the emperor why was he more concerned about the safety of trees when the holy shrine was totally damaged. "Money could repair damages to buildings", re- plied the emperor, "but what money could recover the destruction of as stately and

ancient trees as the four great chinars that stood as sentinels to the mosque, and were the pride of the place?"

The Islamic attitude, as Babar's autobiography would reveal, to- wards natural beauty and preservation of nature's bounty, encour- aged promotion and preservation of natural surroundings. Cleanli- ness and tasteful arrangements of things of decoration and beauty are parts of the true Islamic psyche. Muslims did not interfere with the panoramic beauty of the great city. If so, then pray who were responsible for the violation of the lakes and streams of Varanasi? Who upset permanently the unique character of the city and its environs?

The elimination of the lake, which was a real catastrophic misfor- tune, was in no way less sacrilegious than the mere destruction of temples and images. History highlights the latter, but maintains a dour silence regarding the former. Indeed a cold blooded misad- venture of such magnitude, the obvious cynical disregard to subtle sentiments of the public, deserve the strongest condemnation from aesthetic town-builders and discriminating citizens.

Acts of such determined violation of popular sentiments characterised the administrative life-style of the very functional British rule of the time which was guided entirely by a mercantile approach to a special life-style. Anything even remotely un-British evoked very little sympathy from the insular mercantile community.

Repeated violation of the rights of a people forced the Parlia- ment of England take a very strong look at the misdeeds of upstarts like Clive and Hastings. They were duly accused and condemned. But a later, and more reprehensible bespolier of

the Indian norms, Dalhousie, who belonged to the nobility of England, but whose imperialistic policy caused the Great-Outbreak of 1857, was left alone probably because of the influence he carried amongst the higher social rank of the time.

No, the British rule in India before the hard lesson of 1857 presents a gloomy picture of lamentable sangfroid on the part of the tight lipped rulers who were always observed with a sense of marked superiority over the 'natives' of the land whom they never cared to understand.

Let us just mention in connection with Varanasi one such incident which had been entirely provoked by British misrule. This hap- pened in 1795, and could be fully controlled before 1809. A re- markable disturbance shook the civic life of Varanasi which could no longer stand the high-handed style of functioning of the white foreigners.

The fanatic Virasaiva and Aghora traditions of the people of Varanasi made them prize their sense of independence, which in- spired them to protest at anything they considered as violation of their rights. A sense of desperation characterised their behaviour. Hence they rose in a body and forced a show-down.

A spontaneous and popular demonstration as serious against the rule of the company would never take place until 1857. Naturally the explosion had taken the rulers by surprise. That was Varanasi's retort to the high-handedness of Warren Hastings.

The socio-political situation of Varanasi was rendered extremely sensitive due to several other reasons, most of which touched the pride and traditional rights of the local people.

They felt their hon- our bespoiled and their womenfolk violated. They felt badly robbed of their legitimate place in social India.

Events that had immediately provoked them could be enumerated as (a) deposition of the Nawab of Oudh, (b) his forced and despotic exile in Calcutta, (c) the humiliation of the Begums of Oudh, and (d) the rough and ready manner in which the Raja of Benares was treated. This prince represented symbolically the hon- our of Hindu India.

In spite of the feudal oppressions of the time, the people identified their sense of honour and pride with the traditional ruling houses. The Nawabs were Muslims, and the Raja was a Hindu. The difference did not matter with them as they viewed the interference of the 'Pheringees' (as the Europeans were known) as a provo- cation to all the communities. They regarded the foreigners as usurp- ers, and never accepted their rule, except under a duress. The si- lent mass was on a boil.

When their rulers and their womenfolk were humiliated, the people were rudely incensed. A general spirit of deep resentment hung in the air.

Soon the people demonstrated their anger at the interference of a foreign mercantile community with the royal houses of the land.

'What rights a group of merchants had', they argued, 'to enter India in the name of trade, and then manhandle royalties, and up- set a settled government?'

The first protest came under the banner of Wazir Ali (1795), son of Asaf-ud-daula of the House of Oudh. It was a popular uprising in which all communities participated.

But very soon the tone set by the uprising was disturbed by a communal clash (1809) which caused much bloodshed. It was dur- ing this clash that the great pillar (Asokan?), standing between Laţ Bhairon and Macchodari was broken.

We refer to these historic events because these indicate, however feebly, the changing political moods of the time. These underline the degree of high-handedness of the ruling power of the time.

The destruction of Varanasi was also the result of an equal degree of nonchalant lack of respect for the social values of those people whom they derisively called 'natives'.

So serious was this uprising that the British agent was attacked, and escaped death by the skin of his teeth through a stratagem arranged by some females, and assisted by a 'native' merchant. Many Englishmen were killed inclusive of the aid-de-camp of the Resi- dent.

In an extremely panicky situation the alien ruling class was com- pelled to seek shelter in the garden-houses provided by the wealthier population. These, as we know, were safely situated far away from the centre of the trouble.

In English records we hear of their safe hiding places to be 'outside' the city area, in secluded parts', belonging to the merchant elite.

From these records we learn that between Kabiracaura and Nadessar (which included Jagatganj, Nate Imli and the Varana bridge) there were many gardens, garden-houses.

Generally this part of Varanasi could boast of a sylvan verdurous expanse now totally missing.

From a close study of the above it is established that the north-western section of the lake was considered a 'suburb' of the city, and that the city limits ended with the southern borders of the Mandakinitalão.

In considering the ancient layout of the city the above facts assume great importance. It should be noted that the main city was gradually extending from its northern hub towards the south. And this process continued over many centuries. What we see and ad- mire as the modern Varanasi is but an extension of an ancient town which has partly disappeared, partly thrown out of the city limits. It appears that only a rump of the ancient Varanasi still sticks to its basic central core.

The spirit of Varanasi was made to take a flight for ever, thanks to people who failed to appreciate what Varanasi meant to the Hindu psyche.

This third section was considered, even during the Islamic period, as the limit of the town, the limits of the urbanised Varanasi.

The town area, was defined by the Varana. The Mandakini lake, its immediate environs, the Macchodari lake and the Nala harboured the densest population. Several important shrines made the area all the more important.

Beyond this area Varanasi wore a more or less subdued aspect where verdourous sylvan scenes still flourished (1840).

The fact is, as we have noted, that the city stood atop a shingly hill-range that sloped down into the river, and further below. The river soil made its own bed, over which flows the Ganga. But below the river-soil, and under the river-bed a larger stream continues to flow. The many tanks and lakes, and the numerous

streams collected water from the western slopes, and seeping through the shingles fed the river. It had been observed over the years that a flood in the river used to be immediately reciprocated by a rise in the level of all the tanks, ponds and streams of the ancient city of Varanasi.

Of these tanks some may be named. These were Agastyakunda, Lachmikunda-cum-Misirpokhara, and the huge Beniãtãlão. To this one could add Pisacamocana and Surajkunda.

Isargangi used to be another Talão which reacted to the rise and fall of the level of the river. Kuruksetra and Lolarka too were connected with the rise and fall of the Ganga.

Beniãtãlão, Misirpokhara, Lachmikuṇḍa, Surajkuṇḍa, Pisacamocana, Lolarka, Kuruksetra, and Revatitalão were certainly re- garded as places "outside" the city limits. As proof of this, if proof is required, one may mention the existence of Aurangabad Chowki and the Luksa Chowki. These had been city-octroi posts i.e., city- limits could be marked by these tax barriers. These still function (1991).

The fourth section was situated around the central Visvanatha Hill. This was the most densely populated area, as all people wanted to hug to the business centre. The contiguity of the great temple was an added attraction.

After the destruction of the big temples along the Varana and Macchodari, Visvanatha, considered a minor deity in Varanasi, became the most important deity on the hill.

So from the Mandakini lake and Bulanala on the northern end, to the Visvanatha temple, Godhowlia and Dasasvamedha on the southern end with the Ganga in the east and Lachmikunda and Revatikunda (Reoritalão) in the west, the fourth and the

busiest section of Varanasi Antargṛha flourished age by age Without any let or hindrance.

The only difference was that the magnetic attraction of the town instead of facing the traditional Varana front now faced the Visva- natha Hill. The importance of the Varana had diminished after the mass destruction of the series of prominent temples.

The prosperity of this area meant the prosperity of Varanasi. The peace in this area meant the peace of Varanasi. Trouble and bloodshed here meant trouble and bloodshed in Varanasi.

Beyond this area, along the Ganga, stretched the oft-spoken long hill from Dasasvamedha to Kedara.

It was a long stretch past the busy central hill. No one before the Maratha and Rajput involvement thought of colonising this stretch as no significant tirtha shrine was located there. Exceptions are some minor shrines like Puspadanta, Ganesa of Ganesamohalla and Kedara.

The credit of bringing life to this hitherto abandoned hills belongs to the princely houses of Hindu India (who tried their best to convince the Islamic rulers that by bringing credit to this holy city they would add credit to their mode of governance).

It has to be admitted that the alien Islamic contribution to India seems to have been the irritation of pulling down temples and con- structing mosques and mausoleums over them: the unbridled refill- ing of the materials gained from such spoilations, and using these for construction of mosques. At times wiser counsel prevailed, when the administration relaxed, and the Hindu gained a respite. Such respite came under Akbar, Jahangir and Jahandar Shah of the later Mughals.

Taking advantage of such welcome respites Scindia, Holkar, Bhonsle, Amber, Udaipur, the Peshwas all contributed in a feverish spree of speedy reconstruction of the holy city, as already noted.

Varanasi was always held too dear to the Hindu psyche. To strike at it, was to strike at the most sensitive part of the Hindu ethos. Big or small, all princely houses took a hand in rebuilding Varanasi.

As early as Akbar's time, even a small prince of Bengal, Raja Pratapaditya had contributed to the beautification of a reorganised Varanasi. The well built and stately Causatthi ghat was his contribution.

Generally speaking, these are the facts.

Thus, one wonders about the grand resurrection of the city of Varanasi along the south-north city-bank. A densely populated labyrinth generally described as Bengalitola (a name derived from the colonisation of these parts by people from Bengal, thanks to the role Bengal played in its reconstruction) grew-up as a buzzing area of the city famous for propagating cultural activities.

This long stretch of high hilly range, so far inhabited by tribes and mendicants, became studded with temples, alms-houses, palaces, monasteries and hospitals.

The tale of this growth forms an epic by itself.

For the development of the southern range of Varanasi, and its western valley, upto Reoritalão (Revatikuṇḍa), history is indebted to two illustrious widow-dowagers (1) Ahalya Bai of

the Holkars of Indore and (2) Raṇi Bhavani of the house of Natore in Bengal.

We have already spoken of both. Varanasi is what it is today thanks to the beneficence of these ladies. They appreciated the fact that glorifying Varanasi was glorifying Hindu consciousness. Both the ladies, with an eye for uplifting a cause, acted as pioneers for open- ing up a new Varanasi, and embellishing the old one. The Hindu ethos came to gain from the noble efforts of these ladies.

The question now arises as to who was responsible for the total burial of the great lake and the famed woody growth around its waters? Who indeed? What became of the Macchodari channel? Where and how vanished the famous streams: Mandakini and Godavari of which the K. Kh., K. Mhtm., Agni P., Matsya P., KKT. sing? Who destroyed them, and by destroying them destroyed the very soul of Anandakananam? The wanton destruction of these water-fronts destroyed the sylvan character of Varanasi. Who or what did it?

Who indeed perpetrated this kind of vandalism? Whose ignorance, or spite, or cynical negligence, bordering on a grand scale crime, was responsible for bringing about such a total disaster?

The Hindu-Buddhist, Jaina-Buddhist strifes are supposed to have destroyed the sanctity and seclusion of Sarnath. The Islamic raids brought down the temples, and partly converted the people. But neither the one, nor the other had touched the flora, fauna, panorama and natural set up of the hill-bound town filled with tanks, ponds, lakes and rivers.

Today we do not see any of these. The Agastyesvara temple near Godavari was scenically situated on a decent hill. (K. Kh.). At its foot there existed a crystal lake. An area even now known as Agastya- kunda still recalls a large tank. But in fact, now there is no tank. Instead one of the largest rubbish dumps of the city flourishes there, and merrily solidifies the air with a load of heavy stink.

Similarly there is no Bhutesvara tank, Rudrasarovara or even Manikarnika Kundas. Who destroyed them? How? Why? Why a public latrine and a refuse dump adorn a site so eloquently described in the K. Kh.? And who put up an anachronic eye-sore in erecting an outline Anglican church in the vicinity rifled from a total destruc- tion and devastation of Nature?

These are crying questions, and must be answered.

III

History writing has a sad tendency of showing preference for one or the other communal, or political cause. When history does so, it ceases to be history. Scientific and objective history is difficult to be compiled. When objective history has been attempted by so called 'progressive' minds, one sadly discovers a preference in them for extension of this or that political philosophy.

It has been easy to use a long stick for some historians to accuse Islamic zeal for destruction and loot in the name of religion. In following this popular simplistic treatment of history one is likely to overlook other facts. Such delusions, it is healthy and profitable to keep in mind, are more often than not caused by a notorious crafts- manship of historical bias and misrepresentations. A calculated dose of vitriol is often injected

into social-consciousness: and human mind, as it is, gets prejudiced and blind.

Meanwhile history is made to suffer. The case of Varanasi is a pointer. While history (?) is critical about temple demolitions, plun- der and rape, it maintains silence about the desecration and elimi- nation of holy tanks and streams regarded as tirthas.

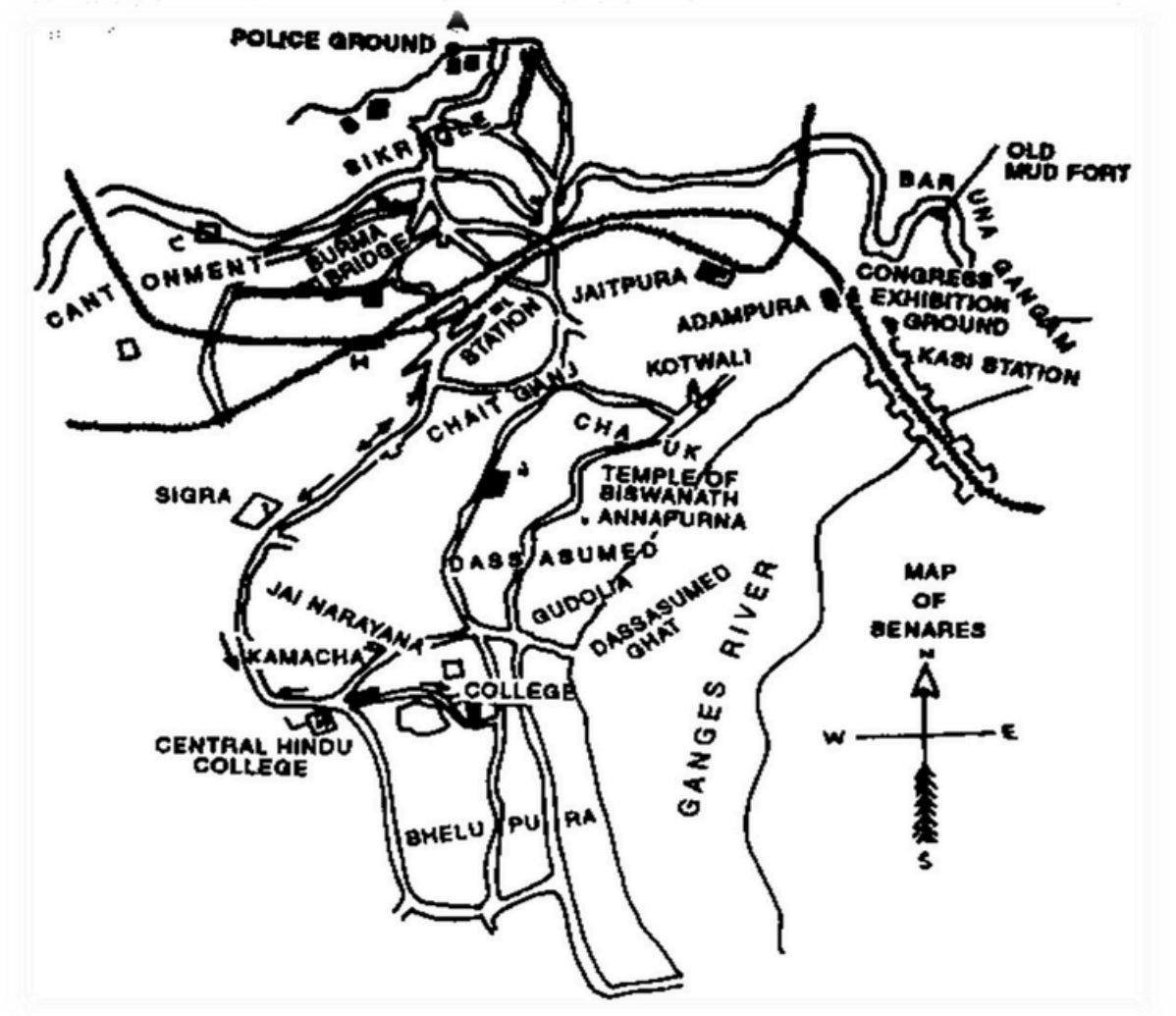
Not without a reason. The ancient hermitages of Agastya, Atri, Samba, Gautama, Bharadwaja, or of numerous other teachers and saints less known, had been settled along these water reservoirs and streams. The Brahmasarovara near Dasasvamedha, or the Rudravasa near Revatikunda or, Batukanatha, or Belgharia (later known as Kenarama-astana), or the hermitage by the lake now marked as Benia-bag, have been in existence eversince.

Varanasi had gained reputation as a centre of learning and spiritual endeavours. The fame of Varanasi rested on these institutions even before temple or image-culture was introduced in Hindu life (first century-third century.)

The destruction of these natural and ancient landmarks could not be regarded in any way less damaging than destruction of man- made edifices.

The citizens of Varanasi have stoically faced for more than two hundred years the systematic vandalization of their ancient land- marks. A distant people, who had remained wholly alien to the norms of the traditional life of the subcontinent, raped without qualms the cherished landscape of a city of which they felt proud. Varanasi as a city had been traditionally held as unique.

[The author himself had observed the blank helpless looks of the silent spectators to these turmoils. An entire populace could be mesmerised by overbearing high-handedness. Those were the days of the Rama-Mandir agitation of Asi, and the horror- days of Jalian- walabagh.]



Map. 12. A valuable old map of the extended city of Varanasi after the English disturbed it by road and railroad constructions

Even the most alert of the citizens, get easily carried away by the facts of temple-demolition. We have seen that the hazard of such destructions was almost invited by those who had thought

it fit to hoard limitless wealth in temples, and openly make exhibitions of such treasures.

Even now the great temples of the Deccans, Gujarat and Rajputana periodically exhibit their amassed wealth for the public to watch and wonder, with probably an ulterior motive to entice the pious to offer equally precious gifts through provoking a sense of competitive devotion.)

The routine of temple destruction could be held against a handful of tyrants, but by and large the Islamic administration of nearly 800 years respected the Hindu norms and forms. If the Hindus had to pay a tax enjoined by the Holy Qur'an to be levied on non-believ- ers, the same administration, to be fair, also made Muslims to pay zakat, and which the Kafirs were not required to pay. It is funny but significant to recall that Brahmins managed to extract from the rul- ing powers an exemption from paying jizya.

Again and again we are reminded, in a kind of history of incidents which only a certain brand of rulers indulged in, entirely for- getting a larger number of rulers whose administration sagacity and military strength heavily depended on the participation of the Hindu community. Trade for instance was almost entirely left to the Hindus. So was agriculture and banking.

The Hindus appear to feel justified in inflaming a counteracting psyche against the vexed problem of forced conversions. This is an error. The prejudice has cost the nation dear. A part of the people have absorbed erroneously into their psyche permanent alienation of one community from another. It appears to be an

entirely illogi- cal stand. Facts do not support it; progress does not encourage it.

History actually shows that in fact cases of forced conversions have been negligible. Let us pause and consider the cases of those who have been segregated by their own folks on the pretext of participation with the unclean, or coming in close contact with them. In fact these unfortunates were victims of forced molestation and interdining. Social barriers raised by the same people against their brethren have ended up in increasing the number of so-called 'con- verts', who had suffered or accepted no 'conversion' formally. They only found themselves cornered in this way to accept conversion. To call these cases as those of 'conversion' is a mockery of truth Conversion of the terrible iconoclast Kala-Pahar is a case in point.

The cases of daily labourers, wage earners, handicraft men, deva- dasis and prostitutes, musicians and the already segregated untouch- ables of the Hindu society were different. They found more security (and some 'honour') under a religion which theoretically maintained equality of ranks in mosques, and did not indulge in caste- barriers. They were not refused the right of entering a place of wor- ship. The people of the lower ranks saw in conversion a hope to rise up in the social ladder. They felt nearer to the ruling powers. Slaves in Islamic society have become kings, even emperors.

Certain communes such as the Nathas, the Jainas and even the Buddhists who could not be accommodated into Hinduism, but who were shunned by the Hindus for their castlessness, found security in adopting the religion of the rulers.

The problem of untouchability and caste has cost the Hindu leviathan more damages then the problem of 'conversion'.

The cases of forced conversion of the non-Islamic population in India cannot ordinarily be held against Islamic rulers. At times this course was adopted against diehard enemies to deprive them of their support from their commune. By and large the idea of 'con- version' as imperial policy was never fancied by Islamic rulers. Some fanatics indulged in it, but they had eventually to pay for it.

If Aurangzeb has been marked for his tyrannical policy against some Sikh leaders, one must not forget that he was not interested in converting Sahu, grandson of Sivaji, when he had ample opportunity to do so. One must not forget that great Islamic philosophers of the rank of Jalaluddin Rumi, or Mansur al-Hallaj were put to death for indulging in what the Maulanas regarded as blasphemy. Salman Rushdie's, or Taslima's is a contemporary case.

In Varanasi, at least, cases of forced conversion appear to have been less than those who were rejected by their own brothers as 'contaminated and soiled for ever', and found shut all doors for a return home.

We get incensed at the mention of destructions of Varanasi temples. But we do not bother to think about the demolition of Sarnath and the devastation of the entire city of Varanasi between the Varana and the Gomati, i.e., the 'other' Varanasi of which we have spoken already. History has noted that a Hindu could perpetrate same inhumanities on purely religious grounds, when a tyrant chooses to do so. Madmen do not write history.

We are happy to condone some misdeeds of a hoary past. We also speak about the great Hindu catholicity in absorbing many aliens within the intimate Indian society: but we do not hesitate to nurse and nurture, like a vendetta, our grievances against, another cousin of the same blood. This kind of prejudice, lack of under- standing is bound to react, and provoke national disintegration.

As a problem, organised conversion in recent years of the Hindus into Christianity has caused and is causing much more dissension than the Islamic problem ever did as an organised institution for active conversion.

In contrast, in more recent years, through indiscriminate demolitions and destructions Varanasi has been forced to lose for ever, subjects of greater value than man-made edifices. It has been forced to miss its proverbial humour, liberal and elevated mind and peaceful tranquillity of soul, and a ready wit with humour that works as a great social absorber.

Varanasi became just another Uttar Pradesh township like Lucknow, Kanpur, Moradabad, Allahabad or Gorakhpur.

The exclusive distinction that was Varanasi, the unique urban-sylvan combine, the magnet-draw for spiritual seekers, - had faded as a lost dream through the rude indiscretions of a soulless admin- istration.

The city has metamorphosed beyond recognition. Nothing re-mains of its old charm. Not a dog barks against such horrid molesta- tion. Yet we are ready to whip up our injured psyche just to secure an avenging triumph over imaginary antagonists, even if they have actually settled down to be a part of our social

structure. In fact these have been our own selves in another quarter, in another time.

Hypothetically the broken temples could be put together again, but who or what efforts, could reinstate the forgotten sylvan grandeur described in K. Kh., or K. Mhtm.? Who or what could recapture the seductive beauty of the flora and fauna of the suburban precincts of Varanasi? The glorious riverine landmarks of the Valley of Ananda- kananam shall never again be reinstated. Unlike temples and shrines, which could be rebuilt, these treasures of beauty have been cast into eternal oblivion. Varanasi, as we see it now, is a soulless chi- mera peeping out of a great past which has been deliberately de-stroyed by a planned (or is it unplanned?) devastation.

The day the green mantle of Varanasi's age-old tapovana beauty was torn down and thrown away, Varanasi was permanently reduced to penury and shame. By losing her green river-dales Varanasi lost her noble chastity. She was forced to stand disrobed and naked. The great city was forced to barter away her pristine dignity and tranquillity for earning a false pretence to being classified as a 'mod- ern city'.

The stone clad Varanasi of the day stands as a tourism-piece, a wonderful creation of man. Few realise today what Varanasi had to go through for accommodating the British town-planners who did not have the required education of cultural perception to realise the enormity of their misdeeds.

But Varanasi was created by the gods. Nature had adorned her, Time had located her as a special habitat in preference to heaven (K. Kh.). That very special retreat died the day when modern van- dals posing as city-builders wielded their pickaxes

and drove their bull-dozers. Even the Ganga has been contaminated due to a fast rate of growth in modernism.

Not a temple, not a mosque, not a monastery, but an entire hive of peace-dripping quietude was smothered within a few decades through bureaucratic callousness and modernity-hunting brutality.

The great Varanasi spirit has unfortunately acquiesced to the en- forced metamorphosis hardly ever realising why and how it has been deprived of its heaven-gifted values.

II

In fact the people had a very little to say in the matter. They were silent witnesses to what was happening. Some even accepted the changes as improvement.

The greatest harm to the Anandakananam complex was caused by the construction of the two railway stations, Rajghat and Canton- ment. A third railway station Alaipura (Benares City), constructed a little later, destroyed a number of features, inclusive of the pilgrim centre of Barkarikunda, the Sarnath-stretch, and the Varana valley.

Rajghat or Kasi Railway station was built by one of those Limited Companies which got registered in England, the Imperial seat, and which exploited a subject territory under a lease-right.

As such these companies, motivated by a heartless greedy profit- drive cared little for a people, and even less for their history or culture, or their sentimental values for religion, which in no way affected the company's modus operandi. The proprietors, share- holders, principals of the contractors were

the least concerned or acquainted with any cultural compulsion. They were not disturbed by any undue qualms. They any way were motivated entirely by a profiteering zeal. They were keen on finishing a job to the satisfac- tion of their masters.

The air of English society in the eighteenth century was charged with the head-reeling mind-boggling profit-potency of foreign in- vestments on real or shady companies. The catastrophe of the South- Sea Bubble-scandal stands as a howling example of such mindless notorious financial misadventures. The indecent greed generated by the profits of the Slave Trade resulted in the catastrophic financial disaster of the century, but averted by an intervention of the Parliament at the instance of the crafty debater Wilberforce.,

Against such greed for accumulation of cash any consideration for preservation of a peoples' native culture, or for their sensitive- ness sounded banal and ludicrous. No English Company of the time would waste time or money for preservation of sanctimonious movements or landmarks of history, specially as they affected a pack of brown natives. Who cared for the preservation of the antiquities of the Aztecs, the Toltecs, the Incas, the Mayas?

Even a practical and aesthetic subject like city planning was allowed to ride rough over all emotional values, architectural considerations or antiquarian compulsions. The men engaged in the job lacked the intellectual perception of a Curzon, or a Princep. (Or perhaps, they were too concerned about achieving minimal utility standards, with a compulsive view of 'saving' money, which was badly needed for decorating London, or building yet another bridge over the Thames.)

These foreign engineers of Railways, Highways Urbanisation rode high on the Indian subcontinent with a gleeful abandon of all percent- responsibilities. Their eyes were set only on increasing the age of dividends of their paltry investments, which, anyway, could have been the overflow from the Indian or West Indian flood of income. With no holds barred, and with the tacit support of a for-eign administration, as well as with the connivance of a straight- jacket bureaucracy, the English capitalists enjoyed a field day for satisfying their evil intentions.

Until the times of Lord Curzon (1899-1905) and until the gentle intervention of such scholarly bureaucrats as Sir William Jones and James Prinsep the stream of marauding devastations of ancient monuments continued unchecked. But for them even the Taj Mahal could have ended up as an object for auction in one of the glamourous pawn-houses of the City of London.

In their eyes the quantity and quality of the marbles was too good and precious to be "wasted on a 'wife's mausoleum".

In these circumstances little could be expected from the city-build- ers of Varanasi. Between 1774 and 1905 demolition and devastation of Varanasi went on unchecked with a ruinously rapid speed.

Warren Hastings in his confrontation with the Raja of Benares (1781) had to taste an ignominious defeat on the banks of the great Mandakinitalao. In fact the great administrator before beating a retreat, had to hide in one of the pleasure gardens provided by a member of the gentry, (Madhodas ki Bagia) near Bara Ganesa and opposite Gola Dinanath. (A memorial marble slab records it.)

Thus the Mandakinitalão stood as a reminder of the dark moment of the great Warren Hastings, and incidentally, also of the might of the British arms. The British administration appeared to be obsessed with Varanasi, specially with the environs of the (a) Mandakinitalão, and (b) the Beniatãlão.

The Talão thus had acquired the reputation of a touchy irritant for the riffled nerves of foreign administrations.

When the town planners decided to run a road connecting the bridge over the Ganga, that is the railway station of Kashi (Rajghat), with the other railway station by the City Cantonment, they decided to seal off the great lake. In the process they sealed off the Macchodari, the Macchodarinala, and permanently blocked the fa- mous river-harbour off the confluence of the Varana and the Ganga.

This enterprise blocked off the soul of the Mandakini lake, and when the straight road connecting the two stations took a turn to the left and climbed up-hill to Maidagin and Chowk, the Mandakini flow too was blocked off.

With one stroke of pen an entire-space of about a hundred acres covered by water, gardens and woods was flattened and levelled with- out a trace of its former glory. A telegraph office, a police station, a post office, a town hall and a clock tower claimed more importance in city life than the gifts of bountiful nature.

The stately Bada Ganesa temple with its splendid cascading ghats is now found tucked away within the folds of a miserable lane abid- ing its time away from public view. A group of hospitals and a cou- ple of colleges occupy the space which had been the south-western section of the lake. As an evidence of

this molestation of a beautyspot, even now one would observe several characteristics dominating this area: (1) the buildings around this area, inclusive of the government buildings are mostly single storeyed. This is indicative of the fact that the structures stand on a soil which originally was provided by filling up a water reservoir, (2) the public road in this area is probably the widest road in Varanasi which suggests that the space was reclaimed from filling up a watery surface, (3) no ancient structure is found situated here, (4) the whole of the Bisessarganj market consists of wood and tile-sheds with no heavy structures around.

Turning further north, between the lake and the Varana we find the most important section of religious Varanasi of the Gahadavala times. The five great temples with their environs used to be here- about. In modern times, this section of the town has remained under a shade.

We know that what is now known as Jaitpura, Adampura, Jalalpura and Bisessarganj, inclusive of Madhyamesvara and Bṛddhakala lo- calities, contained a series of famous temples of Varanasi. These had been demolished and razed to the ground. The formidable sizes of the mounds of the debris could even now be partially seen if one inspects the hill on which stands (1) the Avimuktesvara tem- ple, (2) the adjunct mosque and (3) the Lat-Bhairon shrine.

The last one mentioned, stands today by a mosque.

At one time a dispute between the priests of the shrine and the imams of the mosque (regarding the sharing of the income from gifts), flared up into a major disturbance, and hundreds were killed. It was at that time that the pillar (Lat) of the shrine was

broken. The stump alone remains now. The Lat stands by the decently paved tank Kapalamocana (one that the great Raṇi Bhavani helped to put in shape).

It is very sad indeed to recollect that these tanks, Kapalamocana, Rnamocana and Sapamocana, stood side by side, keeping a safe distance, spreading upto the Varana river. The waters from the Macchodari tank used to overflow from the flood of the Ganga and filled these tanks, which finally emptied into the Varana.

It was at this Kapalamocana tirtha that Govindacandra, king of Kasi had made a special penance. One could imagine how these tanks provided beauty for visitors, convenience to residents and pilgrims, and significance to history.

Today no trace of these are found. The Islamic inroads had destroyed the great temple of Omkaresvara, desecrated the tank, but had spared (until then) the pillar known as the pillar of Asoka, and did not in anyway disturb the tanks or the preserved water therein. Near about, between Trilocana and Ṛnamocana in the south stood many shrines. The rubble heaps from these temples must have posed a formidable problem for the city builders. They had to run the road from the station. So, what did they do?

They took the easiest of courses of bulldozing the mounds to dump and seal the famous tanks. This action stopped for ever the entry of the flood waters from the Ganga into Macchodari and the other these tanks. The action also buried for ever many artifacts of antiquity, and evidences that could help build history.

Macchodari was choked up. Today it strikes as a sad memory that the famous temples of Omkara used to stand on the Macchodari. Similarly the temple of Madhyamesvara and Baḍa Ganesa stood along with hundred temples on the banks of the Mandakini reflecting their magnificent towers on the placid waters of the lake.

The town planners levelled the 'rubbish', and choked the water reservoirs without any compunction whatsoever, thus removing from the map of Varanasi some of its worthy shrines, and more sadly, the surrounding flora of tall trees and thick woods about which we read in the K. Kh. and K. Mhtm., and KKT.

Time has partially retrieved some of the shrines. Time may, we might imagine, construct new shrines. But how to build back the streams, the tanks and the Macchodari channel?

When a temple is destroyed, we get instead a stately mosque. But when the latest wreckers vandalised the famed panorama what did Varanasi get instead? Near Macchodari, at the entrance-road to Omkaresvar, we find ungainly ugly structures of colonial brick and iron mould, used as utility sheds for garbage-vans, buffalo-drags and various other 'requirements' for the town municipality for serving the conservancy department. Stables for donkeys, and buffaloes occupy where Kings and Queens used to celebrate with the common people in religious frenzy.

No! The Islamic raiders destroyed some shrines alone. They did that partly in fulfilment of their religious compulsions: but, being sensitive about natural beauty, they left alone the famed ashramas, tapovanas, hill resorts, streams and tanks. That

special type of cultural consideration helped to preserve the dignity and élan of Varanasi. But the action of the modern raiders had destroyed what nature gave, and man could never replace.

The hidden message of such indiscriminate vandalism made the religious population of Varanasi realise that the latest rulers, in their search of power and profit, reserved little regard, respect or care for the sentiments of their newly subdued subjects. Hastings wasted scant regard for the honour and integrity of Raja Chetsingh, or the Begums of Oudh, or of the life of the upright straightforward, courageous Raja Nandakumar. His aim was money.

But what actually bothered their minds, that they decided to act as they did?

Hastings had reasons for harbouring a special ire against the Nawabs of Lucknow, Raja Nandakumar and the then Prince of Varanasi. Later, challenged by the House of Commons, he had to explain his conduct before the court. His resentment against Chetsingh assumed high heat because of the mauling Hastings and his cohorts had received in the hands of the Benares-crowd. He never forgot that he had to beat a hasty and ignominious retreat from Benares. He never forgot the humiliating days of Madhodasa ke Bagia.

Hence he was determined to flatten an area where his might had suffered defeat and his will was thwarted. That provided sufficient ground for erasing from memory the locality where his flag was once lowered by 'a rubble' let loose by a petty native chief of no consequence.

The construction of the Dufferin Bridge (now Malaviya Bridge) gave the white rulers another excuse to destroy the Rajghat Com- plex, the Macchodarinala and the lakes of Macchodari, Mandakini, Barkarikunda, Pitṛkunda, Rnamocana and Sapamocana.

Even the Ganga was not spared. Let us see how craftily and inhu- manly the sacred river was left to be polluted by mindless Simple Simons. It appears that the new rulers did this job with a vengeance. They could never see eye to eye with a people adoring rivers, trees, hills and lakes as expressions of divinity. In their eyes this was insufferable meaningless paganism, which administrators, nursed in proselytising traditions of arrogance and intolerance, were de- termined to eradicate.

The Asinala was rendered useless because of having been turned into a garbage carrier. Proceeding further north, after Kedara ghat and before Nanda ghat a huge roaring stream of underground garbage and slush empties itself into the river. Bathing is now impossible there, and to this date this section of the river has remained one of those rare gaps along the Ganga bank of Varanasi where people cannot and do not bathe.

Similar drains of filthy outlet of the city mark Ghora ghat, Siddhesvari ghat, and of course the bottom of the Rajghat hill, or the fort embankment. The entire length of a popular river, held holy by millions, was in this way polluted by the zealots of town- planning. This kind of destruction could not have been designed by the Muslims who came from outside, the Muslims who had decided to grow roots here or, the Muslims who were the local converts.

The steady devaluation of Varanasi, the gradual erosion of its sanctity and beauty was a howling instance of the scant regard that the new rulers entertained for the sacred sentiments of mere pagans and humbugs. Heaping similar kinds of degradation on the ego of an ancient culture appeared as a pastime for the rough and ready, down and distant administration that never mixed with the people. On the contrary they decided to create and magnify distances between the ruler and the ruled, and live a preferred, cocoon life, and live as only 'civil servants' and 'the Company's admin-istrators' lived. Every city maintained for this purpose either specially - segregated areas like the 'civil lines' on the 'Cantonments', or 'the Railway-quarters' for the exclusive use of the white civilians and the military.

The subtlety with which this exclusiveness was enforced and reg-istered on local consciousness baffles the finesse with which a card sharper, or a fencer executes his tour do force.

The emphasis that the history-writers on India have paid on the Muslim-Hindu discord gained specially deep cutting fissures on the score of religious differences. This emphasis is both artificially designed, and politically motivated. A balance-headed analysis of the issues involved could have straightened up the imaginary (or real) knots of conflict long long back only if that history were written with level-headed honesty, and constructive sympathy. Unfortunately this has not been the case, with the result that the achievement of a compact and corporate national responsibility has remained beyond the reach of the politicians. This has done, and is still doing, a lot of damage to human progress, and to the national efforts for ending poverty and spreading enlightenment. India could ill afford a social split, and win over hunger and ignorance.

Varanasi offers an illustration of the above observation. With far more abiding and for more severe damages caused to the city, and to the Indian ego as well, critical observation has been totally ignor- ing the grievous and irremediable debasement of the most ancient existing city of the civilised world.

This wonder has been achieved by persistently driving in the prejudicial problem of a Hindu-Muslim divergence and dispute on the one hand, and by cleverly stage-managing a legend of a benign and just rule by a people whose only motive to gain a world control of power was entirely motivated by economic interests. More clever than a cat, more persistent than a cheetah, more swift than a cobra and more intriguing than a peeved mistress the imperial designer of the hundred and ninety years before Indian Liberation, successfully carried on a baseless story, established a fratricidal dispute which assumed the ugly proportions of a vendatta, and hoodwinked a clear- sighted historical perspective.

In looking at Varanasi of the day one may safely conclude that some kind of evil design had taken painful trouble to destroy the beauty spots and the holy places (which also provided public pools and amusement parks), and replaced them with public latrines, garbage dumps, donkey-barracks, garages for filth-carts heaping abomination on insults.

A list of these atrocities could be provided. But any minute observer who, today, could enquire about places like Kuruksetra, Mandakinitalão, Macchodari, Barkarikunda, Rnamocana, Pisaca- mocana, Surajkunda, Godavaritirtha, Prayag ghat-cum-Ghora ghat, Agastyakunda, Brahmanala, Brahmasarovara, Bhutesvara, Revati- talão etc. would be deceived by what he sees compared to what he expected. The list is not exhaustive.

Most of these places have been marked with degrading construction erected in the name of public convenience.

15

The Serene River flows on

I

Varanasi before fourth century BC, and the city after 1800 were entirely different. Almost unrecognisable. The excess that life in gen-eral had enjoyed between the Guptas and the Palas materially affected the sedate self-composed life of the river-bound township, bordering the spiritual habitation of Anandakananam on one side and Mṛgadava on the other side.

Pre-Pala Varanasi (AD 1026), which had attracted Gautama Bud- dha and (500 BC) prompted him to start his sermons from there, is nowhere traceable. The peacefulness of the place was a centre of attraction. And it is no longer there.

By 1026, however, Varanasi had earned the reputation of being a popular trade-centre. The city carried on a brisk commerce in mar- kets lying between the Gomati and the Varanã. The expanding town- ship pressed by the demands of commerce spilled over the river Varana itself encroaching the Mandakini lake of the Puranas and the limits of the modern Lachmi Cabūtara as far as the central hills.

None the less, the active Varanasi town, the town that Buddha knew, appears to have been situated around the Sodepur-Bhitri-Kapiladhara area.

Sarnath as a central piece of the celebrated ministry of the Bud- dha followed its ancient Jaina reputation.

The urban township, as we know, had gradually spread along the southern bank of the Varana over the years, as and when the Kasi- Kosala feuds pushed the people towards greater safety and security of the southern bank. The point is worth repeating.

Upto the time of the Gahadavalas (early eleventh century) the main Anandakananam tract on the crescent hill formation from Pancaganga to Kedara was not much affected by urbanisation. The town-huggers did not dare, enter a forbidden woodland 'infested' by Kapalikas and Aghoras. Moreover, these 'town huggers' stuck to where trade was. Woodlands did in no way attract their fancy.

The rivers and streams continued flowing into the lakes and ponds: woodlands continued sheltering the hermits, scholars, students, and ascetics, who sought undisturbed peace for the pursuit of their individual predilection and humour: saints continued to practise their way of finding meditational success, and poets continued to wax eloquent in describing the spiritual

uniqueness of Varanasi, where all shades of metaphysical exposition and yogic practices found undisturbed scope for their cultivation, promotion and practice.

The changes from that overwhelmed Varanasi since the Gahada- valas were mostly due to internal political feuds, (1) first from the Kosalas, and then from (2) the Buddha-Jaina fisticuffs.

Due to these, the entire north bank of the Varana upto modern Ghazipur because practically disarranged, and concentration of population as well as of commercial activities moved southwards. The city of Varanasi along the southern bank of the Varana and along the Ganga upto Pancaganga became gradually overcrowded over a period.

Even then the main crescent hills and their western valleys remained more or less unmolested. The woods still spread verdure and retained peace: the streams poured water into the large tanks and eventually into the river: the rise and fall of the level of the Ganga still continued affecting the levels of the tanks and the streams: the study-centres flourished: scholars kept classes, and saints were at peace in their individual hideouts along the northern range. The big change came with the sudden explosion of the Pathans from Afghanistan (1026-94). The wealth of the contemporary city of Varanasi specially the wealth of the temples, prompted the hordes to storm repeatedly. They were more interested in the loot than in anything else. Religion supplied a convenient excuse to the history of such turmoils.

There was hardly any escape from this. Varanasi was shaken to its bones through the repeated aggressions. Between 1024 and

1658 the Hindu-world of India in general, and of Varanasi (Vṛndaban and Mathura) in particular, underwent a sea-change. The people of Varanasi lived a life of mute suffering and terror, until Akbar.

This was 1556.

From the year 1567 due to the policy of Akbar, Jahangir and Dara Shukoh (who incidentally was the Mughal governor of Oudh with headquarters at Varanasi) the harassed city received a welcome respite. Varanasi began to recover. The old Varanasi, the classical Varanasi, the Varanasi of the scriptures gradually faded out yielding place to a new-look Varanasi which was painfully shifting itself from the Visvanatha hill down south, towards the Godavarinala and be- yond, where the new Rajputs and Jats with the assistance of the ancient Bhara- Siva (ancestor of the Vakaṭakas) and the 'rejects' of the orthodox society, started a new settlement. We may recall that in the scriptures this area, i.e., the Anandakananam was declared 'out of bounds for the householders'.

The population of the northern and orthodox Varanasi, which had suffered the enforced change from Hinduism to Islam due to the social barriers of the time, and which had lost their ancestral guild-ties, under Islamic dispensations, searched as fugitives from their 'own', for a new footing, a new living, a new habitation. Thus the Muslim pockets began to spring up mostly close to the broken temples in the north, and away in the south on the abandoned west- ern slopes of the hills, the most prominent of which are the locali- ties known as Khalishpura, Madanpura, Devnathapura, Reoritalab, Kali Aurangabad and Ardali Bazar. (The last one is a post- British colony of personal attendants to their administrators.)

Then came the times of Kala Pahar (1560) and Aurangzeb (1658) whose inroads and eruptions, similar to those of Malik Kafur in the south, wrought havoc. For the time Varanasi felt shaken, and help- less. So far the Hindus had been trying hard to cooperate with the Mughals for securing a healthy spirit of coexistence. Many of the broken temples were repaired: the markets got settled: communi- cation became safer, merchants could move their merchandise with reasonable safety: and the imperial revenue showed considerable improvements.

All these positive signs of understanding and growth changed with Aurangzeb. Because of Prince Dara's softness for Varanasi, where he had acted as a governor for a considerable period and where he took Sanskrit and Upanisad lessons from Hindu (Kafir) scholars. Aurangzeb nursed a special wrath against Varanasi. He decided to see to it that (a) all temples under repairs be dashed to the ground; and (b) the newly finished temple of Visvanatha (which was reconstructed by Narayana Dutt during Akbar's time) be taken apart, along with the famous Pancaganga complex of the Bindu-madhava temple. Both the temples were replaced under imperial orders by equally magnificent mosques. The 'sins' of the Kafir Dara had to be washed off. If there was a Daranagar within Benares, Aurangzeb wanted to change the name of the city into Alinagar!

Varanasi after 1627 suffered another change, the push of the population from the north to the south, from the valleys to the hills forced a new Varanasi to emerge and start a new chapter in its im- memorial history.

The security and tranquillity of the ashramas, hermitages, vidya- pitha-s (schools) and meditation centres started being

severely disturbed. The principal Anandakananam' was being uprooted, molested and finally removed altogether.

The periods 1585-1660 and 1707-81 proved of significant importance for the growth of Varanasi. The crescent bend and the hills were mostly built up during this time. The Rajputs, at the time of Akbar and the Marathas, of the times of Jahandar Shah to Shah Alam, together with a few exceptional cases from Bengal (such as Pratapaditya and Raṇi Bhavani) built up the "ghats" of Varanasi. The construction of these famous ghats gave not only a new look to the city, but through subsequent years, turned the ancient hills of Varanasi into a model for a river-side township. To this day Varanasi stands as a wonder to the world of architecture. The crescent now looked as a diadem set on the head of the most ancient city of the world.

By Varanasi, today we mean this section which was built within the times of the early Mughals (Akbar), and later Mughals (Jahandar Shah, Mohammed Shah and Shah Alam). This Varanasi does in no way represent the Varanasi of the scriptures. The Mahasmasana, Rudravasa, the Gauripitha, the Anandakananam became just word- sounds reminding of faraway and forgotten times.

More changes were to come. More and serious damages were poured on the city by other kinds of depredators. These came from the far away British isles. Their town engineers ran havoc on the panoramic equilibrium of a township famous for its natural beauty.

II

The above running analysis is borne by solid facts. Let us enumerate the ghats on the river, and specially, where possible,

their dates. That would substantiate our view (if further substantiation is called for) that the present Varanasi is of modern growth: that the ancient Varanasi has been completely forgotten along with the fort at Rajghat: that the Jaina, Buddhist and early Hindu Varanasi has been left along the northern bank of the Varana and that the commercial Varanasi of the Mauryas, the Guptas, the Sungas is no longer remembered as Varanasi. That had been the real Varanasi.

These reminders and substantiations have to be presented at two stages: (1) 1565-1627, (2) 1734-87.

Between 1565 and 1627 the first set of ghats were built up, mostly by the Rajput houses of Rajasthan.

The idea of creating a new front in Varanasi by abandoning the Varana front was probably inspired by several factors.

The chief one of these was the complete devastation of the Varana front. Both the banks were rendered deserted through successive raids by the Afghan government of Delhi, and by the usual periodi- cal raiders who came for loot.

Sarnath had vanished centuries back. Bhitri, Sodepur and the settlement near the Gomati confluence were rendered deserted by successive raids, lack of protection and loss of trade. The city pushed towards the southern reaches with a hope that the arms of destruc- tion would not stretch that long.

Secondly, the nature of the devastations of very popular and highly honoured temples precluded any reconstruction architecturally, economically, religiously or politically. Abandonment was the inevi- table practical choice left.

Thirdly, the people of these localities had changed their character and composition. Although stray cases of Hindu habitation were not entirely missing, by and large, the ancient crowded localities were filled with new converts, who were far too sensitive to allow new constructions of temples. The associated shopping centres gradually faded out. With the construction of new temple sites the shopping centres too changed sites.

Through centuries of utter neglect the Varana's navigability was rendered a subject. The shallowness of the river did not encourage a fresh investment of life, property and industry along its banks.

Therefore, the decision to reconstruct Varanasi entirely along a new front, namely, along the hilly elevation, appeared to be a sound choice, particularly in the face of the fact that the area concerned had been run down by a medley of unspecified riff-rafts of doubtful citizenship with more doubtful occupations. To be cleaning up the area in the name of thorough reconstruction was to clean up Panelope's guest-house. Its abandonment was a sound practical decision.

During the first period quite a number of ghats were constructed. We owe historical information about this from a completely unexpected source.

We had occasion of referring to the records of an English traveller by the name of Ralph Fitch. He had visited Varanasi when the city had been enjoying its first respite from the periodical ravages, i.e., during the times of Akbar and Jahangir, the third and the fourth Mughal emperors.

The reconstruction was made possible by the energetic initiatives of Raja Mansingh and Raja Todar Mal.

Fitch found Varanasi a busy township doing a brisk trade in cot- tons and handicrafts. Reading Fitche's diary today gives a refresh- ing feeling of going through a detailed picture of the cross-section of the raw life of a town filled with philosophy and superstition, saints and thugs, beggars and bulls, frauds and businessmen, schol- ars and scoundrels.

Fitch did not see the 'ghats' of Varanasi. The Ganga of Varanasi at his time entertained bathers through mud, slush and shingly de- scents from formidable heights. He however, does not name the ghats. There perhaps was nothing remarkable to name as definite units. Even the crematory ghats had no fixed terminals to be named specifically.

Luckily we could lay our hands on another record named

Girvana Padamanjari (Blossoms of Divine Talk) written by Varadaraja (1600- 1660). In this book we find mention of some ghats. These are as follows:

1. Rajghat-Near the Varana Confluence, and below the Old Fort.

All these (2-7) are still in use, and are found clustered around the Pancaganga.

2. Brahma ghat, (3) Durga ghat, (4) Bindumadhava ghat.

5. Trilocana ghat is still a famous bathing place near Gaya ghat.

6. Agnisvara ghat is near Rama ghat.

7. Nagesvara ghat is now known as 'Bhonsla ghat' since the ghat was repaired extensively by the Bhonsla rulers of Nagpur. 8. Biresvara ghat adjacent to the present Manikarnika ghat.

9. Siddha Vinayaka ghat-The fame of this Vinayaka has christened a locality still known as Siddha Vinayaka.

10. Jarasandha ghat-No longer is known by this name. Now it is known as Mir ghat, referred to before, where Mir Ali had constructed his fort.'

11. Bṛddhaditya ghat-Refers to the names of the sun temples of Varanasi. This one is near Visalaksi off Mir ghat.

12. Somesvara ghat-Near Tripura Bhairavi.

13. Ramesvara ghat-Near the present Manmandir.

14. Lolarka ghat-Near Lolarkakuṇḍa at Asi.

15. Dasasvamedha ghat-Still in use, but the ghat was paved with stone steps much later.

16. Catuḥsasthi Yogini or Causatthi ghat-The famous ghat is still in use.

17. Sarvesvara ghat-Near Pandeya ghat (recently repaired).

18. Kedara ghat-Another famous ghat still in use.

Besides the ghats the Girvana Padamanjari also mentions certain localities all of which are associated with pilgrim centres. This shows that at that date localities in this area developed around religious places as their nuclei. These localities are: Svargadvara Pravesa, Moksadvara Pravesa, Ganga-Kesava, Asi-Sangama, Varana-Sangama and Lolarka. These are localities entirely built around religious interests.

Of the ghats numbers 2 to 10 could be considered in a bunch, hugging close to the crowded Pakki Mahal and areas around the old Mandakini and Macchodari lakes.

Of the new extensions north of Manikarnika we find the Catuḥ-sasthi Yogini ghat and the Kedara ghat. Kedara ghat was a south Indian construction dedicated to a saint by the name of Kumara-swami, whose headquarters are still functioning in full glory, uninterrupted.

This cannot be said of the other exception Chatuḥsasthi ghat. This was constructed by a hapless prince of Bengal who wanted to get free of the Delhi-subjugation, and was finally brought to Varanasi as a prisoner by Raja Mansingh who, at the prince's request, was left there to spend his later years in religious pursuits. He had constructed extensive palaces and gardens on the river bank. These have now been acquired by an organisation run by the disciples of a saint named Thakur Sitaramadasa. But the Yogini temple still sur- vives, and attracts thousands of devotees throughout the year.

Another set of ghats (nos. 11-16) have been constructed around Manikarnika and Visvesvara temple, inclusive of the Tripura Bhairavi Lane Complex where almost all the Tantra 'Devi'-s are still found housed in humble temples.

It would be interesting to note here that in the times past this lane used to be principal thoroughfare between the Mandakini neighbourhood, Lachmicabütara and Dasasvamedha. It was only 'after' the British engineers ran a street connecting the Rajghat Railway station and Sonarpura, past Maidagin and Godhowlia that the Tripura Bhairavi lane was pushed to a secondary role.

Yet this lane, and its Tantric past holds a fund of mystery for those who are mystically minded.

It is remarkable that although the Visvesvara temple and Jnana-vapi have been molested time and again, these humble Tantra hide- outs have more or less remained intact. Was it because Tantra centres prefer a low-key existence, and would never appreciate collecting attention through ostentatious wealth?

This is yet another proof that most of the raids had 'lots of wealth' as a strong incentive, which worked more effectively than any religious compulsions.

The oldest construction in present Varanasi is said to be the Man- mandir ghat on which stands the Tantra temple of Varahi. The elaborate and ornate construction of Manmandir was completed by Raja Mansingh of Amber, whose descendant Jaisingh utilised the great ghat and the building as an observatory. The natural height of this hill might have suggested to him its utility value as a meteorological centre.

This was one of the four great astronomical observatories which the genius of Jaisingh, a talented man of many facets, had constructed in Jaipur, Delhi and Ujjain. Amongst the many ghats in Varanasi this is a unique construction and became a precursor of many more inspired buildings from other princes of India.

With these ghats the first phase ends the reconstruction and exten- sion of Varanasi carried on upto 1660.

III

The second phase (1707-81) started with the humiliation of the Delhi Emperor by the Rohilla chief. Under the pressure of his dire predicament he sought assistance from the Maratha chief Mahadji Sindhia. The Peshwa offered assistance and protection

against a special concession namely, to build up Varanasi, Mathura and Vrndavan.

This concession supplied inspiration to build up the shingle-laden hilly banks, and seal up an entire 2 km length with stone galleries as steps running into the water. Massive stone bastions were erected as bulwarks for containing the constructions against the turbulence of the river in the monsoons.

At places the hills run up to a height of 110 ft and over. The gradient, dangerously and treacherously steep, challenged the skill of the best of indigenous builder craftsmen. Instead of making a drab matter-or-fact construction, the imagination of the architects decorated the hill-side and the hill-tops with palaces, gardens and temples which evoke inspiration and admiration to sight-seers even today.

One cannot help admiring the skill of the builders who came here from all over India, and measured their mastery of building- skill.

The ghats which were built during the second phase are the following:

Asi has always been regarded as one of the three great bathing places along the river, the other two being Manikarnika and the Varana Sangam. Strangely enough neither Asi nor Varana can boast of a paved 'ghat' set in stone steps, running into the water.

This probably is due to the vagaries of the current. But both Asi and Varana are ranked high as places for holy dips. Asi has the Lolarkakunda nearby, and Varana is famous for the Kesava temple.

After Asi ghat there comes Tulsi ghat. This ghat was too weakly built to withstand the fury of the current on the bend of the river, and could not withstand the current too long. In no time it fell into disrepair. Because of the memory of saint Tulsidasa the ghat never went out of use altogether, and still carries on a precarious existence.

A recent ghat, neighbourly to Tulsi ghat, is well built, and is dedicated to a modern-day saint Mã Anandamayi, and has become quite popular.

The Chetsingh Fort has no ghat although the river front is excellently built for use as a quay, where the boats of the king used to anchor.

Actual bathing used to be performed at the nearby Sivala ghaṭ: a very well built structure, intelligently built in a flat design, avoiding a steep elevation so that the current receives little obstruction.

Next comes Hanuman ghat, known besides Hanuman, a great devotee of Rama, also for the shrine of Ruru Bhairava, a memorial to dogs, constant followers of Bhairavas, who preferred living around Smasanas (funeral grounds).

The smasana nearby is the most ancient funeral ground of Varanasi, and is known as Hariscandra ghat. We have already spo- ken about the incident which made an officer of the King of Varanasi to start an alternative cremation ground at Manikarnika. Previously Hariscandra ghat used to be the most haloed crematory ghat.

The fame of Hariscandra ghat attracted popular notice due to its association with the Aghori-Tantra-Saint Kenarama whose astana (abode) is situated in the nearby Sivalaya area, which

used to be covered with wooded forest as late as 1900. From Sivala to Gaivi the whole area was regarded almost out of bounds for the common householder.

Next to Hariscandra stands the magnificent Kedara ghat, sturdy and strong, steep and noble, ready to meet the force of the current of the river's bend, and make the course more passive.

This ghat was built in the times of Akbar by one Kumaraswami of Thirunelveli in Madras. But the shrine of Kedara is found mentioned in K. Kh. where a Brahmin by the name of Vasistha has been eulogised for his zeal in bringing the spirit of the Hiranyagarbha deity Kedaranatha to this Hiranyagarbha (Swayambhu) of Varanasi. It appears to be the only shrine of Varanasi which has never been molested.

Cauki ghat (a river toll-tax barriers?) built next to Kedara has been in miserable condition over a long time. Recently the city-fathers have done some commendable repairs.

After this ghat comes a rather long stretch where no one bathes. This probably is due to the presence of a big drain hereabout which fowls the water. But washermen take over this vacant stretch and wash their stacks of clothes, which does not much help pollution.

Between Hariscandra ghat and Kedara ghat two humble ghats might be missed: One, Lali ghat, supposedly built by on Lal Shah, a Faujdar. After Lali ghat there appears a small ghat known as Lachmi ghat. A third but decent ghat known as Vijainagaram ghat is the construction of the south Indian prince of Vijainagaram.

After Cauki ghat the humble Somesvara ghat is often missed although the shrine of Somesvara is situated on the bank.

Manasarovar ghat was constructed by Raja Mansingh of Amber. A series of ghats built hurriedly by wealthy men of Maratha and Bengali origin have become almost extinct. Only the Amṛt Rao ghat, built by Peshwa Vinayaka Rao, looks presentable, and is popularly known as Raja ghat. This is followed by another ghat taken over by washermen and buffaloes.

Ganga Mahal ghat and Pandeya ghat have been the gifts of the famous Panḍeyas of Varanasi who hold a monopoly of acting as 'guides' to the pilgrims who visit the holy city.

Next comes the famous Catuhsasthi ghat which has been mentioned before.

Rana Mahal ghat is a gift from the Raṇas of Udaipur. Next to this ghat stands the imposing palatial building of Maharaja Darbhanga from Bihar. The ghat was built only after the 1914-18 war. But the palace is an early nineteenth century construction, and has been a favourite with cameramen.

One Munshi Sridhar Prasad built a steep riding but efficient ghat, with a balcony-garden high atop. Munshi ghat is an imposing as its neighbouring Ahalya Bãi ghat.

With this stops the later constructions of Varanasi ghats. None of these was existent as à la mode ghats until the sixteenth century Mughal Emperor Akbar the Great.

The ancient ghats stretching from the Dasasvamedha ghat to Pancaganga ghat have been mentioned already. These were mostly constructed during the two separate periods of Mughal reprieve and grace. But most of these ghats are held in pious regard by devo- tees because of their honoured notice in the Puraṇas. In contrast from Chowki ghat (north of Kedara) to

Manikarnika the ghats (except Dasasvamedha and Prayag) all ghats are of post-Mughal construction.

When the Delhi authorities sanctioned a reprieve, the Maratha activities were by and large confined to the stretch of the bank be- tween Manikarnika and Pancaganga.

Compared to this, the ghats in the south of Manikarnika, except Manmandir ghat, Kedara ghat, Raja ghat, Causatthi ghat and Rana Mahal ghat, were of late origin, almost modern British period.

The Sitala ghat occupying the north corner of Dasasvamedha and Prayag ghat occupying the south corner remind us of their scriptural heritage. As ghats these are portions of Dasasvamedha, which was the ancient Rudrasarovar, with the Rudravasa atop the eleva- tion (the famed and holy ground is now usurped by a market and a Rama temple), and bordering the Godavari channel. Rudrasarovar had died with the sealing of the Godavari channel, although along with the howling sign 'Dasasvamedha ghat' the sign 'Rudrasarovar' appears still as a standing mockery.

The ghats between Dasasvamedha and Adi Kesava have already been mentioned. These are the Manmandir ghat (the oldest in Varanasi), Tripura Bhairavi ghat, Mir ghat, or, the Jarasandha ghat of the Puraṇas. Mir ghat was constructed by Mir Rustam Ali, an official of the Raja of Benares (AD 1735). Mir Rustam Ali had built a magnificent fort here. The ruins of the fort could be distinguished even now. The construction was, however rendered loose and precarious due to the high current in monsoon. The Raja of Benares, while building, his fort at Ramanagar dismantled the fort and used the material in

building his fort at Ramanagar. Rustam Ali was a man of catholic disposition and refined taste.

After Jarasandha (or Mir) ghat comes the Lalita ghat, Lalita Tripurasundari being a very distinguished Sakti deity, Atop the hill, parallel to the bank, from the Manmandir ghat-point to the present Visvanatha temple-point the presence of famed Sakti shrines de- note the activities on these hills of the pre-Aryan forms of Siva-Sakti Bhairava (Vama) worship. In those days the entire hill range, from Manikarnika to Dasasvamedha had been covered by a forest through which flowed the popular Godavari channel. On this hill to this day we find the shrines of Kali, Varahi, Matangi, Tripura or Lalita, and the consort of Visavanatha, Visalaksi.

People in Varanasi still believe that the land stretch between the present Dattatreya temple and Jam ghat (Yama ghat), where the dead were cremated) and the shrine of Smasana-Vinayaka (situated near the palace of Bhaddomal) in the Chowk area there used to be a wide cremation ground. This would be a stretch of a mile and a half. We have mentioned this in connection with showing how the crematory grounds 'moved' along with the movement of the 'city' from the north to the south.

An interesting ghat stands between Lalita ghat and Manikarnika cremation ground. In fact it stands to the south of what used to be the Umraogiri ghat, which is in total ruins. The debris cascade from the 70 ft high hill-top to the river. The past grandeur of this ghat could be estimated from the still extant stone brackets, pillars and gates hanging precariously from the top of the debris. (The Giris have been a famous line in

Varanasi, some of their descendants still live near the Varahi Mandir.)

The interesting ghat above mentioned is known as Nepali-Khapra ghat. It is an addition from the King of Nepal to the string of Varanasi ghats.

The temple follows the architectural design of temples in Nepal. It appears to be a Vajrayana Tantra or Vama Tantra temple of wor- shipping the godhead as deities in perpetual union.

Manikarnika brushes shoulders with Jalasayi ghat. It has been made conspicuous by a half submerged, slanted, but beautiful tem- ple, too often photographed by tourists, as also painted by artists since Princep.

The famous shrine of Dattatreya, the Bhairava par excellence, stands close by the conspicuous ruins of a grandiose attempt to raise one of the noblest shrines on the bank with a grand ghat to go along. The whole structure has been swept down by the subterranean single-bank and mud stream, and a whole stretch from Manikarnika-Jalasayi ghat to Bireswara ghat leans askance merged in sands and shingles.

The tragedy hit the attempt of Queen Baijabai of the House of Gwalior when she had decided to commemorate her mother's name. Experts say that a subterranean stream (there are many such streams flowing through the shingly hill formation) gradually ate into the basic plinth and shifted it away with the result that the magnificent structure crashed down one black day. To this day the ruins stick out scattered over a large area as a tragic reminder of defective engineering.

In order to retrieve this, the House of the Sindhias repaired and constructed the wide Sindhia ghat to the north of Dattatreya ghat. Immediately south of this stands Sankaṭa ghat, constructed by the munificence of Gahana Bai, another Maratha queen.

A magnificent ghat of very recent built stands in the immediate north. This also is known as the Scindhia ghat with a noble building facing the river. It is also known as the Gangamahal ghat.

We have spoken of Yajnesvara ghat, Rama ghat and Mangala-

Gauri ghat. Close to the last is Dalpat Rai ghat. Along with this stands the beautifully constructed Peshwa ghat, constructed by the Peshwa Baji Rao. It is more popularly known as Balaji ghat.

When Tavernier visited Varanasi he saw the great

Bindumadhava ghat of Pancaganga spread over a larger stretch and commanding the view of the Bindumadhava temple of Pancaganga. All that was brought to ruins by Aurangzeb. Later reconstructions were both weak and desultorily constructed without giving the effect of one single unit.

We have discussed the names of the ghats between Pancaganga

and Adikesava. There is nothing significant to add to what has been said already.

All those were constructed during or after the rise of the Maratha and in the waning days of the Mughals. So Varanasi before the twelfth century and after the eighteenth century may be regarded as two different cities.

With all these later decorations, the lost grandeur of the

spiritual Varanasi could never regain its calm, sedate and tranquil compo- sure of self-containment, and what remains is

merely spectacular, amazing in structure, but empty and husky in absolute reality.

Varanasi prior to the Buddha and upto the first century AD could only be studied in terms of forests, ashramas parks and garden shrines where saints meditated, experts conducted classes and the realised scholars delivered their sermons to the harassed of lives and hungry of spiritual contentment.

Far from the madding crowd's ignoble strife

Their sober wishes never learn to stray:

Along the cool sequester' vale of life

They kept the noiseless tenor of their day.... -Gray

And thereby hangs a tale.

We have been trying to show throughout our dissertation that (1) Varanasi was a town by the river Varana and spreading upto and beyond Sarnath, Bhitri and Kapiladhara (or Kaithi); (2) that the holy town of Varanasi included the Macchodari and the Mandakini lakes, and was known to be within the Omkarakhanda; (3) that the principal pilgrim sites, i.e., the sites developed in the centuries fol- lowing the Christian era, did not reach beyond the Omkarakhanda; (4) that the town extended towards the south gradually, stage by stage, and is still spreading under the pressure of (a) popula- tion explosion, and (b) different attacks from the north; (5) that the hills spreading between the modern Chowk-rise to the Asi-end, which includes

(a) Godhowlia, Agastyakunda, Benia, Dhruvesvara, Bhutesvara, the long stretch of Bengaliṭola, Madanapura, Revati- kunda and Lachmikunda had been the famed above known as Anandakananam: and (b) that the great ghats of

Varanasi have been built at the cost of a magnificent woodland by post-Akbar Rajputs and Marathas, and as such are recent additions to a town, which had been traditionally spread along with the banks of the Varana.

This entire area was known as the 'Ksetra', an honorific significantly Tantric, and striking strange nuances of Aghori Siva-Sakti Tantric practices. It shows that the Ksetra of the Mahasmasana of Gauripitha was the much adored pre-Aryan habitat of the Ghora-Sivas, Bhara- Sivas, Kapalikas and 'tribes' described as Vama-s or Vama-s, or Vamamargis.

The hills of Varanasi are as old as human memory, and the steady demolition of the once famous woods, forests, springs and streams in the interest of a perpetually spreading urban population and their demands, has buried the glory of Anandakananam under a mound of rubble and dross.

What had been the legendary Varanasi, Anandakananam and Rudravasa, what had been the great Ksetra and Gauripiṭha of times immemorial, is now only a nocturnal echo in the empty ruins of a forlorn castle.

Time, the Father, the ruling deity of Varanasi has chewed into its very marrow.

We of today grope in the dark amidst some faded sweet sounding names and search in vain for the real Varanasi that has for ever retreated into the dark abyss of Oblivion.

That majestic moon has set for ever,

Never to be back again!...

While the World struts around

in spring-time carousals,

The sighs from Beyond

cover up the melody of the flutes and tabors.

And mute sobs swell.

Yet Hope abides within the tears that Life sheds awhile.

-Tagore

Notes

1. Svayambhu lingam Often in Hindu parlance the word svayambhu (self-created;
self- emanated) has been referred in connection with describing a lingam. Bhuvanesvara in Orissa, Kedaresvara in Varanasi are only two such examples. There are hundreds scattered all over India. The duadasa- jyotir-lingams (the twelve effulgent lingams) are famous.

But what is actually a self-propelled, self-revealed lingam? or, a Svayambhu lingam?

The devotee is often carried away by an imagined, or inset idea that the great Lord, out of compassion for His followers, made Him- self 'revealed' in the form of a linga. Had that been possible in the physical world, there would be no suffering amongst the living, and perhaps no death at all.

Unfortunately the Laws of Universal disposition do not run on simplistic lines: neither do miracles oblige the expectant every

now and then. Those who look for miracles, sometimes find themselves rewarded by sudden and inexplicable events: but psychologists cat- egorise such events as self-projections, or delusions, or wishful think- ing and acceptances. Scientifically speaking such miracles rarely find serious customers.

Yet there are Svayambhu lingams: and the popular acceptance could not entirely be rejected as a fib. There must be some plausibility.

And there is.

We have to bear in mind that the culture of the lingam as a deity had been cultivated and popularised by the original tribes as they had been prompted by their own simple way of wonderment at the mystery of reproduction and multiplication of Life. The continuity of the Life-Process drew from them the greatest homage and affec- tion for this they found themselves much obliged to the generative forces of Life as acting through certain limbs of the body-machine.

But they hesitated to carve out in three dimensional forms their own inner motivation, analysis and discovery. Thus they found their Dream-God mysteriously projecting Himself through caves and fin sures, which ejected waterfalls and springs.

As caves and fissures project to minds one form of the genitive process, the rocks, peaks and conical projectiles conveyed to them another complementary form of the same process. One symbolised the female, the other, the male.

Before carvings in stones had been achieved, much before an- thropological human forms in clay, stone and other media had been achieved, the simple man worshipped the trees, the fissures that the ploughs had carved in the field, and certain

mounds near a village unit where the grateful hearts brought their thankful hom- age to the unseen powers.

In doing so at times they discovered naturally projected cones of the deep lying hilly peaks, in possible and impossible locales, and called these as self-projected lingams as Svayambhu lingams.

This happened long before man carved the linga-forms in stone,

or collected conical boulders to be used as lingams, and even further down history when they could process regular carved images of Siva the creating-assimilating power for whom the living raised praises.

Thus wherever man discovered a hill-top in a conical shape projecting from out of the usually accepted flat fields, or grounds, dis- covering them unexpectedly and suddenly, they preserved it and sanctified it by their devoted attention.

These are accepted as Svayambhu lingams.

The twelve jyotir-lingams, Bhubanesvara, Kedaresvara, Kedara- natha, Pasupatinatha are some of these famed Svayambhu lingams. Kedaresvara and Badrinatha are two similar examples.

Somanatha is not a Svayambhu lingam, but Mahakalesvara in Ujjain is.

2. Classical references to the names of Varanasi

A. The 26th chapter of Kasikhanda of Skanda Purana has this:

... Avimuktam-idam ksetram kadarabhya bhuvasthale

Param pratithimapannam moksadamcabhavat katham

Kathamesa trilokibhya giyate manikarnika

Tatrasit kim pura svamin yada namara nimnaga.... The question was asked by the Rṣi Agastya to Skanda, or Kartikeya, the son of Parvati and Siva.

... From which time this land known as Avimukta had gained its reputation: how it was declared, and from when, as a place where salvation (for the dead) was guaranteed. How and why this has been sung as Manikarnika, and known as such over the three worlds? And before the stream of the Ganges was not discovered there, who or what resided there? (slokas 2-3)

What Skanda said in reply to this question was not claimed by him as 'his' version. He says that this question was asked by the Supreme Mother to Siva Himself: and what He had said to the Mother could be repeated:

Evam apraksit Ambika Haram

Yatha ca Davadevena sarvajnena niveditam

Jaganmatuḥ purastat...

Ambika had asked the same question to Hara: and I could only report the same to you... Varanasiti Kasiti Rudravasa iti prabho

Avapa namadheyani kathametani sa puri.... How did the city gain so many names as Varanasi, Kasi, Rudravasa etc.? (slokas 3-4)

Tatas-tad-aikalenapi svairam viharata maya

Sva bigrahat svayam sṛsta svasariranapayini

Pradhanam Prakṛtim tvanca mayam gunavatim param.

Later when I (Siva) had been roaming alone, I decided to eject from my own Self the Pradhana-Prakṛti composed of properties (gunas) and maya (emotional draw), a cosmic concept beyond worldly analysis (param). (slokas 21-22)

B. Jnanavapi

Why vapi? What is vapi?

Tadaga is a tãlão or a large pond as the Reori or Revatitãlão used to be. Kupa is a well, as is the Dharmakupa, or Kalakupa. Lolarka might be called a vapi, but the most renowned vapi is the Jnanavapi. The waters of a vapi must be approachable from all the four sides by well laid stone steps.

[cf. Vapi casmin Marakata-sila-baddha-sopana-margaḥ. (Kalidasa in his Meghadutam)]

C. Mahasmasana

(a) Smasananam ca sarvesam smasanam yat param mahat

Piṭhanam paramam pitham usaranam mahosaram

(sloka XXXV.2)

Of all the Smasanas the one that is unique is the sanctified seat (pitha in Varanasi), the great seat, which is the most arid of the arid places...

(b) Sma Sabdena savaḥ proktaḥ sanam sayanam ucyate

Nirvacanti Smasanartham mune sabdartha kobidaḥ

(Sloka XXX.103)

(According to Nirukta) the root sma means a dead-body, and sanam means to lie down. The learned who are experts in etymology thus extract the meaning of smasana....

D. Rudravasa Rudra dasa-dasa pracya-vaci pratyag udak sthitaḥ ürdhadiksthasca ye Rudrah pathyanteveda vadibhiḥ Asamkhyata sahasrani ye Rudra adhi Bhutale Tat sarve-bhyadhiko kasyam jantabo Rudra-rupinaḥ Rudravasah tataḥ proktam-avimuktam Ghatodbhava. (sloka XXX.97-101) The ten meridians of the earth's space are guarded by the ten Rudras. The eleventh one protects the zenith. The Vedas sing of these Rudras. Of the innumerable Rudras who crowd this earth, the ones who as living bodies reside within Kasi exceeds all (in honour). Hence the place is known as Rudravasa. Oh Ghatodbhava (i.e., Agastya) they never leave this place.

E. Anandakananam

Reference to the Cosmic Union of Primal Forces

In chapter VI of this book the Union of the Cosmic Forces has been referred to rather explicitly and vividly. This is not mere imagination.

From the Primal Material Presence, from the Ultimate Unit known as Puruşa, evolved, through the powers of will, a second unit of Activity, Sakti, or the mechanism of creativity for which the property of distinction as well as of gradation evolved. This Primal Power with its Volitional tendency of creative multiplicity has been termed as Prakyti, in which lies innate the gunas and the powers of Con-sciousness and Will. With these properties playing their own roles, the Primal Puruşa, the Still Quiet and Absorbed conscious presence was brought in to play

the part of Creation. This Cosmic Play has been described as Ramanata, Lila (coital-play), Body-Play, With the Mind and Consciousness playing their own parts. Metaphorically this cosmic process had to be described in phrases and images known to the living world as sexual vigour, sexual approach and sexual ecstasy. The phrases play the mischief of bringing up the factor of 'sex' in the cosmic process: but in fact the phenomenon so described only project and reveal the intimate knowledge of Creation through participation of opposite forces of sleeping inert matter and the dynamic forces of will and projection into multiplicity of life.

The following lines aptly describe this:

Sa saktiḥprakṛtiḥprokta saḥ puman Isvaraḥ paraḥ

Tabhyam ca ramamanabhyam tasmin ksetre Ghatodbhava.

Paramananda-rupabhyam paramananda-rūpiṇi

Panca-krosa-parimane sva-pada-tala-nirmite.

Mune pralayakalepi na tat ksetram kada ca na

Vimuktam hi Sivabhyam yad-avimuktam tato viduḥ

Na yada bhumi na yad-apam samudbhavaḥ

Tada vihartum-isena ksetram-etad-vinirmitam

Idam rahasyam samkulam veda kopi na Kumbhaja

Nastikaya na vaktavyam kadacit carma caksuşe

Sraddhalave vinitaya trikala-jnana-caksuşe

Siva bhaktaya prajnaya vaktavyam ca mumuksave

Avimuktam tad-arabhya ksetram-etad-udiryate

Paryankabhutam Sivayo-r-nirantara-sukhaspadam Tasya-nandavanam nama purakari Pinakina Ksetrasyananda hetutvad-avimuktam-anantaram Anandakanda Vijanam-ankurani samantataḥ Preani sarvalingani tasmin-Ananda-kanane Avimuktam iti khyatam asid ittham Ghatodbhava (slokas 24-35)

F. Kasi Avimuktam mahaksetram na muktam Sambhuna kvacit Nirvana-kasanat-yatra Kašiti prathita puri. (sloka XXIX.5) 3. The three important lingams of Varanasi according to Kasikhanda Hrdaye tasya jayante triṇi linganyasamsayam

(sloka XXX.4)

Undoubtedly the three lingams evolve out of his heart. What are the three lingams? (1) Kṛttivasesvara; (2) Omkaresvara; (3) Trilocana

Note. It is remarkable that Visvesvara's name is conspicuously ab- sent. This may be due to the greater attachments of the fierce and non-Vedic Rudriyas with a Bhairava Visvanatha, who has been de-scribed in K. Kh. as 'Kapardi, Isana and Jati', the descriptions fitting snugly the description of the roaming bands of non-Vedic Bhairavas even today.

The above three shrines were located along the Varanã and Mandakini complex. Of these Krttivasesvara's temple was the

high- est and most extensive. The tower could be seen from a great distance across the Varana. K. Kh. this to say about the height and grandeur of this shrine:

Krttivasesvarasyaisa maha prasada nirmitiḥ

Yam drsṭvapi naro durat kṛttivasa-padam lavet

Sarvesam-api linganam maulittvam kṛttivasasaḥ

Omkaresaḥ sikha jneya locanani Trilocana.

(XXXIII.62-63)

For the glory of Krttivasa a splendid temple has been raised. Men who look at it even from a distance attain the state of Kṛttivasa. Of all the lingams (in Varanasi) the crown is Kṛttivasa, the raised locks are Omkara, and Trilocana is the group of three eyes.

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